

Time Is:

Time Was:

Time Yet to Be

by

Janet Stewart

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(inscription on an old sun-dial)

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JANET STEWART

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Time Is: Time Was: Time Yet to Be

The Captain of the U.S.S. Enterprise stretched, planted his feet on the top of his Chief Medical Officer's desk, and reached for that medic's brandy bottle. With a deep sigh, he poured himself a generous measure, then, belatedly recalling his manners, raised the bottle - and his eyebrows, questioningly - in his friend's direction.

McCoy shook his head regretfully. "Better not, Jim. I've my rounds to do still; and anyway - " lifting the bottle he peered disbelievingly at its contents " - I'm not due for a rise at the moment."

Kirk grinned up at him. "Sorry, Bones. I do seem to have got through rather a lot. Well, now I know what to buy you for your birthday."

The doctor's trained eye noted with pleasure the degree of relaxation his friend had reached. Half an hour back, Kirk had come through his door and slumped wearily in his most comfortable chair; he had been quite worried by the strain on the Captain's face. Although he knew little of the technicalities involved, he was very aware of the difficult weeks the crew of the big Starship had lately endured. Two tricky missions completed in as many weeks; a Peace Treaty signed, after much deliberation, by a most unpeaceful set of Elders on the Gian Peninsula; a course of military exercises successfully performed. All had taken heavy toll of the hard-pressed crew, and the heaviest toll of all from the man who had done that pressing; the demanding, commanding Captain himself.

Well, now at last they would all be able to rest properly for a while. Kirk had been explaining to him that as soon as they had delivered the consignment of life saving drugs to the plague-stricken Comus system of Thuite, they'd be off at warp seven for a spell of R & R on the famous and beautiful planet Ondiren.

"And about time too," McCoy yawned. "Much more of this, and..." He was interrupted, as he so often was, by a persistent, shrill bleeping from the intercom. . .

Grunting disgustedly, he reached for it. "McCoy here."

Uhura's deep velvet voice was apologetic. "Sorry to disturb you. Commodore Benson wishes to speak with the Captain, top priority."

"If it's trouble, I'm resigning," Kirk threatened, then, "put him on, Lieutenant...audio only, though." He winked at McCoy. "The sound of that old windbag's voice is quite enough for me at this time of night, without my having to concentrate on his earnest face. No sense of humour, you know. Come on, Uhura, patch him through - what are you waiting for?"

"I am through, Kirk, and have been for some time. However, I will ignore what I just heard, in view of the seriousness of the situation." He took an audible, deep breath. "I regret to inform you that the situation on Comus has worsened alarmingly. Their only hope is of getting your drug consignment as soon as possible." The Commodore paused for so long that Kirk wondered if he'd finished, and was just about to speak when, with another deep sigh, Benson continued. "I'm afraid, Captain Kirk, that you will have to take your ship through Compton's Hazard after all. We are depending on you, Kirk; there are over three million people in need of that drug."

As Kirk switched off the intercom, McCoy got up and went to stand by his side. "Compton's Hazard, Jim. Isn't that the place where time stands still?"

Kirk started to move to the door, turned as he reached it, and looked rather gloomily at the doctor. "I'm afraid you're over-simplifying it, Bones. The Hazard is a fusion of time warps, something like the Guardian of Forever on a smaller scale. If we get up to top speed, and keep on the exact track plotted by Compton, we should suffer no ill effects. It's not a place to enter lightly, however. Starfleet's initial instructions were to skirt round it. Unfortunately, as you heard, time is now at a premium. By going through the Hazard we will save twenty-four hours, our time. No need to tell you that that could save lives, Bones."

"Jim, who was Compton? Did he - " McCoy found he was talking to thin air. "The speed that fella moves at, sometimes you'd think he was on warp power." With one finger, he stroked Nurse Chapel's pet tribble that had escaped from its cage again and was running round in circles on his desk. "One of these days, Christine might just remember to fasten the catch when she puts you back in your box. Oh no you don't." He lifted the tribble from the papers it was beginning to nibble, and with gentle fingers deposited it back in its fur-lined box.

When all the tribbles had been transported to the Klingon ship, this one had somehow got overlooked. The ship's librarian had discovered it, weeks later, contentedly chewing its way through a collection of rare printed books, and had thankfully handed it over to Nurse Chapel, who had been browsing in the library at the time. Seeing there was only one of it, the medical unit had decided it must be a sterile tribble (a great rarity) and Chapel begged to be allowed to keep it. It had become a great favourite with most of the crew. Captain Kirk treated it warily, unable to really believe that it was sterile, but the First Officer of the Enterprise, Mr. Spock, made a point of giving it a surreptitious pat whenever he had cause to be in sickbay. Of course, the unemotional Vulcan made sure that no-one was looking first.

After leaving McCoy's office, Kirk lost no time in getting up to the bridge. His mind was racing as he rode the lift up through the big ship, and his plans were already formulated when he stepped out to face his expectant bridge crew. As always, his eyes first sought for Spock's. As always, when he found them, the brown eyes were already fixed on him. No matter how crowded the room, how unexpected the meeting, Spock's eyes were always waiting for his whenever he looked for them.

Turning from that swift, shared, necessary glance, he looked at each of his bridge crew in turn. "You heard the message," he told them. "Now we must translate it into action. Mr. Spock, time of entry into the Hazard, at warp speed seven?"

Spock had it ready for him. "Four hours and thirty two minutes, sir."

"Right. Mr. Chekov, Commander Compton has already plotted our course for us. Do you have it ready to lay in?"

"Ready on your word, sir."

"Let's have it now, then. I hope your hands are extra steady tonight, Mr. Sulu."

The young helmsman turned, and grinned at the Captain. "I'll do my best not to land you in the middle of tomorrow, sir," he replied. Encountering Spock's raised eyebrow and slightly unnerving stare as he turned back to his helm, he shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Only joking, Commander," he told him apologetically.

"Some matters are best not treated lightly, Lieutenant."

"Yes, sir." Sulu turned back to his post, ignoring Chekov's disrespectful wink, and wondering which of any matters Spock would consider could be treated lightly.

Smiling, Kirk turned to his Chief Engineer. "Scotty, your engines behaving themselves?"

"Aye, sir, they're in fine fettle. I'll just run a wee check or two, but I doubt you'll have any trouble from that quarter."

"Don't overdo it, Mr. Scott. I want all of you to take a break before we arrive at the Hazard. Uhura, please page reliefs for all present bridge personnel, including yourself. All hands, as soon as reliefs arrive, take a break of three hours. Be back at your posts at 0100 hours, no later. Try to get a couple of hours' sleep. Spock, come with me, please. We'll discuss this further in my quarters."

Captain and First Officer were silent as they rode the turbolift down to the level of the Officers' Quarters, and walked the few metres to Kirk's cabin. Silent, as they often were when alone; relaxed and comfortable in their shared quietness.

As his door whooshed closed, Kirk smiled at the Vulcan, who had paused to study their half finished chess game. Spock, feeling the Captain's eyes on him, looked up sideways at him, and smiled in return. Four hundred and twenty seven members of the Enterprise crew would have been amazed to see that smile. One other member of that crew, while suspecting that there might be occasions when his Vulcan friend let his hair down, would still have been surprised at the warmth and depth of the smile. Kirk was neither amazed nor surprised. He knew that smile very well by now.

Spock turned from the game, and straightened up. "Business first, Jim?" It was really more a statement than a question. Kirk came and stood in front of him, resting his hands lightly on his shoulders.

"And pleasure later." He finished the quote softly, then grinned as he lowered his hands. "Though how much later, my friend, is anyone's guess. I'm beginning to feel like an over-strung robot. Come and sit down, and tell me the risks we will run by going through that blasted Hazard." He slumped in a chair, pushing another towards Spock with his foot.

Obeying, Spock settled himself. Although not actually slumping, he was not quite as erect and alert as usual. The past few weeks had severely taxed even his super-human strength.

"As far as we know, Jim, if we keep to Compton's route, and maintain warp seven, we should encounter no difficulty," Spock echoed Kirk's earlier explanation to the doctor. "Unfortunately," he continued, "some ships have experienced difficulties despite following these instructions to the letter. Some report that the instrument readings are affected by the magnetic pull of the time warps, although appearing to register normally. One theory is that warp speed changes as the time warps are crossed. However, no-one really knows what goes on in there. Few linger long enough to study it in detail." Stretching his long legs out in front of him, he took a deep breath. "Three ships have been logged as disappearing whilst crossing it since Compton's plan was put into action."

"What are the odds on our 'disappearing', Spock?"

The computer section of Spock's remarkable brain clicked into action. "Zero point seven one three percent, Captain," it supplied almost before Kirk had finished speaking.

Kirk grinned affectionately at him. "Seems long enough odds. Well, we must obey orders anyway. Those poor devils on Comus might stand a chance if we get this drug to them." He stood up, stretched and yawned. "I'm going to take a nap, and a shower, and I'd advise you to do the same." He glanced concernedly at his friend. "No - make that an order. You look dead on your feet. We'll both need our wits about us in a few hours' time."

Spock uncurled his long form and stood also. "I shall of course obey your order, Captain. A 'nap', as you quaintly call it, would be welcome, and if you feel I am in need of a shower..." He crossed to the door, Kirk's grin following him, Kirk's voice halting him as he was about to open it.

"Make it a cold shower, Commander...and that, too, is an order."

Four hours later, precisely, the highly trained space experts who made up the bridge crew of the U.S.S. Enterprise were at their stations. They had all been briefed as to their duties, and were spending the short time left before entering the Hazard in checking and re-checking their instruments.

The Captain sat relaxed in his command chair, waiting for Lt. Uhura to put him on intra-ship visual. He watched her expertly working her computer, and smiled as she turned to him.

"All set, Captain," she smiled back at him. Kirk leaned forward slightly in his chair.

"This is the Captain... As you know, we are involved in a mercy mission to Comus, to deliver a desperately needed vaccine. Unfortunately, events there have taken a turn for the worse, and it is imperative that we get the consignment there in the shortest possible time. This entails a change in plan. The ship has been re-routed to pass through Space Section X134/B, better known as Compton's Hazard. We will enter the Hazard in seven minutes' time and will be in it for eight minutes. During this period, the ship will be on red alert, and all personnel will take extreme caution with their actions, and report immediately any extraordinary phenomena. Kirk out."

Leaning back, he was immediately aware of Spock at his elbow. The very casualness of the Vulcan's stance told Kirk that something was troubling him.

"What is it, Spock?" He kept his voice low, not wishing to alarm the rest of the crew. Spock's voice was equally quiet, for the same reason.

"Not good, Captain. Sensors report an ion storm erupting in the centre of the Hazard."

"Will it prevent our passage?"

"No, but it could make it more hazardous." He stopped abruptly, Kirk's grin spotlighting his unintentional pun.

"Well, we must expect it to live up to its name, Mr. Spock. We will just have to be extra careful. If it's at all passable, we have to go through it. Three million people are depending on us." He left his chair, and wandered purposefully round his beloved bridge, watching and encouraging his competent and trusting crew, until Spock's quiet,

"One minute to entry, sir,"

brought him back to his command position.

In the uncaring darkness of space, the massive ship swept into the unknown, seething anomaly that was Compton's Hazard. The mood on the bridge was one of total involvement; with their instruments, with each other... Sulu guided the Enterprise through the swirling photon clouds and Kirk, his intuitive powers at their most sensitive -- as always when his ship or crew were threatened -- stood behind him, now moving the helmsman's arm a fraction, now checking the navigator's console; powerful intelligence and superlative reflexes ready for action at a moment's notice.

Steadily, they sped at warp seven deeper and deeper into the timeless mass, and such was the level of concentration, they were all surprised when Spock raised his head from his hooded console and turned to the Captain.

"Time to emergence, one minute...fifty seconds...forty...thirty...twenty...ten...zero. Hazard behind us, Captain."

There was a lovely feeling then of general euphoria, of long-held breath released. Kirk put a hand on Sulu's shoulder. "Well done, helm. Nice work, all hands." He beamed round at his loyal crew, pleased with their performance, with his ship, and, truth to tell, with himself. Full marks, Commander Compton, he thought. You did a damn' fine job there, plotting a course through that little lot.

The infamous X134/B safely behind her, the Enterprise sped smoothly on to Thuite and its stricken satellite Comus. The actual delivery of the vital drug took only seconds; simply a matter of beaming it down, and sending a message of sympathy and encouragement to the medical team receiving it.

Once this was safely completed, the whole ship seemed to heave an enormous sigh of relief. Kirk instructed Chekov to plot in the course once more for Ondiron, and all looked forward at last to a few days' uneventful travel and a



couple of weeks' rest and recreation on the holiday planet.

The evening following their trip through the Hazard, the two leading officers of the Enterprise and the ship's Chief Medical Officer were taking their ease in the Officers' Lounge. Spirits were riding rather high that evening, and the long curved room was noisier than usual. Nurse Chapel had carelessly allowed her pet tribble its head, putting it down to have a run round the pool table. Unfortunately, this was not enough for the intrepid little creature, which, finding itself free, and in the mood for travel, hopped neatly over the side, down the table leg, and took cover in a nearby forest of unsuspecting legs.

Kirk and Spock had been attempting to play a civilised game of darts but the gradual build-up of noise and converging bodies, added to remarks regarding the questionability of persons unable to score a bullseye being in charge of steering a Starship through space, proved serious obstacles. After hearing the sixth variation on this theme, they decided to call it a day and sat down in a corner, where McCoy was quietly downing his second and final brandy of the evening.

Over in the far corner, the ship's Chief Engineer, in full dress tartan of the Scott clan, was coming to the end of rendering 'My love is like a red, red rose' in a fine carrying tenor to a small but highly appreciative audience.

"You look a bit pale, Jim. Are you all right?" McCoy squinted at Kirk.

"Perfectly all right, thank you, Doctor. Don't you ever - "

He was interrupted by Scotty's last line - "Till a' the seas gang dryaaagh!"

"Good God," murmured Kirk, turning to see the burly Scott, purple in the face, hopping around with a tribble in one hand.

"Tak' the damn' wee beastie away and lock it up!" he shouted, thrusting it into a red-faced Chapel's hands. "Runnin' up ma leg in the middle o' a fine ballad like that. Gave me the shock o' ma life. I didna ken whit in the galaxy it was!"

Christine took the tribble, soothing it gently. "It's your own fault," she shot back spiritedly, "if you will wear a kilt at the slightest opportunity. The poor little thing thought it had found another tribble when it saw your sporran. It was just trying to get to it, that's all."

McCoy and Kirk joined in the roar of laughter that greeted these remarks, and even Spock had difficulty in controlling his eyebrows. When they sank back, gasping, into their chairs, Kirk was glad to see McCoy, forgetting his earlier remark, get up and join the group around Scotty.

Truth to tell, he had been feeling rather faint when the sharp-eyed Doctor had spoken. He felt fine again now, but for a few minutes had felt strangely dizzy and light-headed.

The feeling had gone as quickly as it had come, and Kirk, no hypochondriac, was only relieved that McCoy had not pursued the subject. He got to his feet, stretching; looked down at Spock, who was watching him quizzically. Crossly, he knew exactly what was going through Spock's mind. Damn McCoy!

"Didn't your mother ever tell you it was rude to stare, Mr. Spock?" he asked nastily, then grinned as Spock, quite unperturbed, continued to watch him. "I'm fine, Spock, truly. Do I look sick?" And indeed he looked anything but. "I'm turning in because I've had enough of the racket in here, that's all."

"I will walk with you to your quarters, Jim. I too have had as much company as I need this evening." Rising elegantly, he joined the Captain, and gradually they made their way through the crowded room to the door.

When McCoy returned some minutes later, he was surprised to find his two companions gone. Hope Jim's O.K., he mused. Perhaps I ought to check him over. Better leave it till morning, he decided. He's probably just tired, worn out with the strain of these past weeks. Spock seems to have gone with him. If

anything is wrong, he will contact me. Think I'll turn in, too; it's been a long day."

McCoy had indeed been right to trust Spock with Kirk's well-being. After escorting the Captain to his quarters, he had watched him enter, and turned to leave.

Kirk, wheeling just in time to see his friend making for the door, reached for him and pulled him back, turning him to face him.

"Don't go, Spock - not yet," he said softly, his eyes raking Spock's face. "Hell, Spock, what time have we had these past few weeks? We can relax now - at last. I know what's bugging you - Bones' remark just now. But I'm all right, Spock, my friend; my friend of friends. I asked you before, do I look ill?"

Spock listened to the soft voice, noted the glowing eyes. Certainly he did not look ill now. He looked vital, alert, and yet...

"Jim, t'hy'la, you look well now, but you were very pale before. You said you were tired; we can wait a little longer." Resolutely, the Vulcan turned again to the door. Again he was stopped in his tracks by Kirk's voice.

"Spock, please." Spock turned, unable to ignore the appeal in that voice. "Just for a while," continued Kirk, smiling disarmingly.

Spock tried to hold firm resolve against his friend's undermining charm. Knew he had little hope of success. He stared at Kirk for a moment in what he hoped was a quelling manner, then his eyes betrayed him as they softened into a reluctant smile.

"Just for a short while, then." Crossing the room, he sat in his chair at the waiting chessboard. "Do you feel well enough to continue our game?"

Joining him, Kirk grinned down at him. "Well enough to beat you at it - you stubborn Vulcan. How many times do I have to tell you I'm not ill."

They pulled their chairs close to the table. Kirk adjusted the lights to dim. Relaxed and easy, they bent absorbedly over the board.

The holiday atmosphere on board the Enterprise increased as the big ship sped on her way to Ondiren. Always a happy ship, and a proud one, her present mood was more than usually light-hearted. After the preceding weeks of strain, and over-work, the crew, though conscientious and efficient as ever, were experiencing that marvellous euphoria that comes with relaxation and the knowledge of a job well done.

The Bridge was no exception to this mood, and Captain Kirk could feel waves of other people's contentment flowing all around him as he sat in his command chair the following morning.

He, however, was notably exempt from this collective mood. Waking surprisingly early with the beginnings of one of his bad headaches, he had showered and shaved, then realised he had better take what Bones McCoy called his early warning pills. These were quite strong and, if taken in time, usually did the trick. Not this morning, though. He had no stomach for breakfast, even having to force himself to drink a cup of coffee, and by the time he arrived on the bridge to relieve Lieutenant-Commander Zulko, he knew he was in for a really nasty day.

He was not expecting it to be quite as bad as it turned out. The pain got gradually, relentlessly, worse. By mid-morning, he decided to wait only until Spock came on duty at 1100 hours before taking himself off to Sickbay. Catching himself, a few minutes later, snapping Chekov's head off for no reason at all, he knew he could not even wait for Spock.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Chekov, that was uncalled for," he apologised quietly, then turned to his young helmsman. "Sulu, take the con. I am going down for a word

with Dr. McCoy." - which was true in word, if not in spirit.

Chekov watched the Captain leave the bridge, a slight frown on his face. "He looks terrible," he remarked to Uhura. "Do you think he's going to see the Doctor because he's ill?"

"He's got one of his heads." The beautiful Communications Officer looked worried too. "I can tell by his eyes. No wonder, all the strain he's taken. He needs a rest more than any of us."

Stepping into the lift, Kirk thought that at least he wouldn't need to worry Spock. McCoy would give him some sort of shot, maybe make him lie down for half an hour...

He was proved wrong in this. When he stepped out of the lift, scarcely able to see for the throbbing agony behind his eyes, he tangled with Spock, about to get in on his way to the bridge.

"Steady, Captain, you might - Jim, what is it? Are you ill?"

Kirk tried to smile reassuringly. "I'm all right, just a headache. I'm on my way to get something for it. He put his hand on Spock's arm, steadying himself for a moment, then turned towards sickbay.

"I will walk with you to sickbay." Spock fell into step, looking with deep concern at his Captain's white face and heavy eyes.

Almost blind, Kirk doggedly put one foot in front of the other, forcing himself to keep moving, seeing only through a thick haze of agony. Suddenly, between one blink of an eye and the next, the pain left him. His vision cleared. Amazed, and weak with relief, he looked up towards the familiar doors of sickbay.

The familiar was familiar no longer.

The walls of the curving corridor had gone, and in their place was an avenue of some sort, of strange, dry trees. Over where the door to the sickbay should have been stood an ornate red building, glowing in the remorseless heat of a glaring red sun. He stopped dead in total amazement; his stomach lurched in fear. Where in the Universe was he? He turned to his right, to where Spock had been walking beside him. There was no-one there. He was alone.

"Spock?" he shouted. "Where are you?" Where am I??? "Spock!"

Abruptly, Spock jerked to a halt, to match Kirk's sudden arrested movement.

"What has..." His voice trailed off in mid-sentence, frozen by Kirk's desperate cry.

"Jim." Reaching quickly, he pulled him close, holding him firmly. "It's all right, Jim, I'm here, I've got you." There was no response at all from the man in his arms, and after a few seconds Spock gently stood away from him a little. Holding him by the shoulders he looked anxiously into his face.

"Jim?" he said softly, then, shaking him slightly, "Jim...JIM!" He peered desperately into Kirk's clear hazel eyes. Still clear, but shockingly blank, they looked straight through Spock's as if they didn't exist, he didn't exist... Even as he watched in chilled disbelief, Kirk gave a little shudder, eyes rolling upwards, and crumpled under Spock's hands.

Losing no time, the Vulcan swept him up into his arms, and moved swiftly towards sickbay, relieved to see McCoy standing just inside the door.

"Jim's ill," he stated rather unnecessarily, and, following the doctor's beckoning, carried the Captain to one of the casualty bays and gently lowered him onto the bed.

McCoy questioned Spock, clinically and thoroughly, whilst carrying out preliminary tests on the comatose patient.

"He could not see me, Doctor, he looked right through me. He was on his way to ask your assistance for a bad headache. Has he...do you think... Surely he

is too young to have suffered a stroke?" The dark eyes did not even try to hide their misery, their fearful apprehension.

"No-one is too young for a stroke, Spock." McCoy snapped upright. "But no, that's not the trouble. I'll have to carry out extensive tests, of course, but my initial examination shows no brain damage, no cardiac arrest, no lowering in blood pressure, brainwaves normal..."

"Are you trying to say that there is nothing wrong with him?"

Controlling his irritation in the face of Spock's misery, McCoy took a deep breath. "No - obviously something is very wrong. At the moment I can see no cause, that's all. No doubt further tests will reveal one; until then..." He shrugged. "I am as baffled as you, Spock. All his functions and reactions are as normal as yours, or any healthy man's."

"Surely, Doctor, people in normal condition do not suddenly go delirious and then collapse." Anxiety made Spock's voice abnormally harsh.

Sighing, the doctor turned from his patient, gave Spock a long, kind look. "Give me a little time; I will do my very best to find what is wrong. Hell, Spock, I care about him too, you know."

Spock turned one of his rare, soft glances on the Doctor, making him wonder, irrelevantly, what it must be like to see Spock as Jim must sometimes see him. "Forgive me, Leonard. I will not delay you further with foolish remarks. I know if there is a way to cure him, you will find it. I must go on duty. Please, inform me if any...if..." Quite unable to continue, he moved to the door.

"Spock, just a minute. Last night, you and Jim left the Officers' Lounge together. He didn't look too good to me. I even wondered if I should check him over. How was he when you left him?"

Turning from the door, Spock came back to the doctor, his usual calm expression replaced by one of anger, and surely...guilt? Warily, McCoy watched the Vulcan walk over to where Kirk lay unmoving on the bed; saw the anger disappear, but, if anything, as Spock's gaze returned to him, the guilt deepened.

"I should have listened to him." Dejectedly, Spock sat in the chair by the side of the bed. "I suggested he should rest, but he insisted he was all right. We continued our chess game. I only intended to stay a short while, but the game became very absorbing... We played well into the night." Raising his head he looked bleakly up at the doctor. Suddenly, it came to McCoy that Spock's former anger had been for himself. Confirmation of this came with Spock's next sentence.

"As you said, Doctor, he had not looked well earlier. I should have left, insisted that he rest."

McCoy shook his head. "A game of chess would not have harmed him, Spock. It would have relaxed him as much as sleep. No need to blame yourself." He grinned, imagining the scene. "I know Jim. I can just see you both, you trying to get him to rest, him being pig-headed in the most unashamedly charming way in the Galaxy."

Spock's head raised sharply. "His...charm, as you put it, is part of him, Doctor. It is quite natural..."

"No need to defend him to me, Spock. I know it is natural. That is what makes it so effective. Don't worry; as I said, a relaxing game of chess could do him nothing but good."

Spock rose to face McCoy. "Leonard, when we bonded on Vulcan*, Jim and I, you were present. You heard me promise to put his well-being before my own. Despite what you say, I feel I have fallen short of that promise."

"Where is your logic, Spock? By the same vow, if he had felt ill, Jim would have admitted it - to you, at least. As I remember, that was what led to your

* Confrontation, published by S.T.C.C. in Fizzbin 17.

bonding, in the first place." He could tell by the Vulcan's eyes and slight relaxing of the shoulders, that Spock acknowledged the truth of this. He let his own face relax a little. "Go on, go and clock in, Spock. I'll keep you informed." Turning his back on the First Officer, he returned his attention to his patient, began to prepare the Captain for extensive tests.

Kirk could hear Spock's voice, feel his strong hands supporting him. He must be right in front of him. Why, then, could he not see him?

"Spock - oh Spock, where are you?" he whispered. As suddenly as the agony in his head had vanished, so, now, did Spock's supporting arms. And with the arms, the voice also. He was totally alone. Confused, he sank to the ground, became aware of its heat, of the heat pouring down on him. Unbearable. He must escape this heat. Opening his eyes, he saw again the ornate red building, shimmering in the relentless sun. Slowly, he dragged heavy feet over to the promise of ease given by the avenue of dusty-looking trees. Aeons later, he reached them, sank gasping, exhausted, under the nearest tree, leaning against its rough support. Now out of the sun's direct heat, he began to look around him, trying desperately to place himself. Sure though he was that he had never been in this unknown place before, something familiar about it nagged at the back of his mind. He could not pinpoint this vague feeling, however, and the more he tried, the more it eluded him.

He put his head in his hands, attempting to sort some order out of this chaos. He had been on the ship with a headache. No, his head had been splitting with pain; no ordinary headache. Spock had been with him... "Oh, Spock," he murmured, miserably. "What in the Universe has happened now?" Had he perhaps died? Certainly the pain had been bad enough - though surely this was not Heaven? What makes you so sure that's where you'd go? His humour returned to him, making him feel a little better. Well, he answered himself, the heat and colour do seem to point to its being the other place!

Stop there, ordered his mind excitedly. That's it! Remember the time you and Spock set out on that four day hike? Time before last we were on Vulcan? We'd not gone far, climbed for perhaps an hour out of the town, when we came to the arid, desert-like foothills visible from the windows of Sarek's villa. The torrid star that was Vulcan's sun had beaten down on them remorselessly, throwing long patches of brilliant red light over the barren rocks, and Kirk, throwing himself down in the shade of one of the bigger rocks had called, "Spock, the heat and colour. I feel that I must have died and gone to hell."

He grinned at the memory. Spock had been none too pleased at the aspersion cast on his home planet. Then his grin faded. That rocky, redhot landscape had been very similar to this place. This weird, dry, dusty land he had so unceremoniously arrived in. Could it possibly be Vulcan?

As he sat, stunned by his theory, the world again turned upside down. Seized from behind by invisible hands, he was dragged, struggling and terrified, to his feet. There was nothing supernatural about his captors, however. Squinting upwards and sideways against the blinding sunlight, he found he was looking into a rather stupid, though not vicious, face, and turning to his other side, saw a similar one there. Both men were watching him rather apologetically. Both were Vulcans.

"Come on, now," the captor on his right spoke in a thick, gruff voice. "No use trying to escape again. You'd only be caught again. Better make the best of it, like we all do. There's ~~any~~ a worse family you could have gone to."

Wondering what in the Galaxy he was talking about, Kirk was nonetheless relieved to find he could understand him perfectly. Spock's patient teaching and his own deep longing to share his bondmate's language had resulted in Kirk's having a very good grasp of both spoken and written Vulcanese. Though lacking the flow and grace of Spock's speech, it was easily recognisable. This was, then, Vulcan. Though how he had come there was a complete mystery.

The two burly Vulcans, taking Kirk's silence for assent, began to move down the avenue. Still holding onto his arms, they took him with them, leading rather than pulling him.

The other spoke. "If we hurry, we'll be back before M'Lord gets home. He need never find out you tried to escape. Saleek will not tell him. He'll be only too glad to have you back in time."

Totally bewildered, Kirk stumbled along with them. As the distant building came nearer, the ground became more cultivated. Bushes and exotic flowers abounded in what were obviously planned gardens, and lush lawns of orange grass bordered the path.

Too confused, hot and weary to struggle, Kirk walked quietly with the Vulcans. He presumed that they were making for the house. Once there, surely he would find someone who could help him. Someone who perhaps knew Spock and Sarek, who would direct him to Sarek's home.

The trees in the avenue were thick and full now, giving a delicious shade, and, somewhere, he could hear water trickling over stones. Again he felt an odd, haunting familiarity, and memory nagged him as he tried, without success, to pin it down. He looked at the house, very grand now, as they moved closer to it; gazed at the flowers and gardens, more lush with every step he took. No, he had seen none of it before; and yet...and yet...

All three silent now, they arrived at the house, passing under a huge, ornately carved doorway and into a cobbled courtyard. Palm trees shaded the area, and directly in its centre, a fountain played, its spikes of water shooting high into the air. As they crossed the courtyard, making for a door in the opposite wall, Kirk had a strong intimation that he was being watched. He glanced sharply upwards, and his eyes met those of a young boy, perhaps twelve years old, sitting half in, half out, of one of the square windows. Again his memory lurched in recognition - but of what?

They passed through the door and into a long, low passage. A fat, pompous man came hurrying over to them, looking hot and cross.

"We've found him, Saleek." The man holding Kirk's left arm spoke quickly, as if hoping to stave off trouble. "He was at the end of the Drovers' Way, just sitting there. He's come quietly with us. He doesn't seem violent, though I do not think he understands our language."

The fat man raised his eyes in the direction of the ceiling. "That's all we need, for My Lord's new personal slave not to know a word he's saying." Sighing deeply, he turned to Kirk. "Surely you speak our tongue?" His shrewd eyes raked over Kirk, surprise deepening to amazement as he noted the unpointed ears, level eyebrows and dusty Starfleet uniform.

"Who on Vulcan chose this young man for My Lord?" he enquired of no-one in particular. "We were promised a young, strong, intelligent, high-caste slave."

The two men who had brought him in looked closely at Kirk, seeming to see him for the first time. "Hmm, he does look rather strange," said one of them. "Probably comes from Outer Luarden, the other side of the Satelk Mountains. My wife's second cousin once knew someone who had relatives there; she said they were very odd." Pausing, he regarded Kirk rather pityingly. "Well, he looks strong... Saleek - he's not uttered one word since we took him. You don't think ... What if he... Suppose he's a deaf mute."

All three Vulcans stared at Kirk in horror. He returned their stares in total bewilderment. He might as well have been a deaf mute; he was quite unable to speak. What had the fat one said? That he was a slave? A slave? What could he mean? This had to be sorted out, and fast. Deaf mute? How dared he! He, the highly articulate Captain of the Fleet's Number One Starship, would soon show them! He opened his mouth, and...froze. Mouth open, ready for speech, power of that precious commodity frozen yet again. He watched the cause of this paralysis move out of the shadows and into the vision of his three companions. Watched them,

suddenly aware of the new presence, turn swiftly to face it. Saw them bow deeply. Noticed the watchful respect in their faces. Registered all these facts with perhaps one quarter of his brain...the rest aware of the over-riding, overwhelming, glorious realisation of the identity of this new presence.

His face lit up with joy and relief. His faculty for speech returned. He moved, arms outstretched, towards the dear, familiar figure.

"Spock? Oh Spock, thank God..."

The coldness in the dark eyes stopped him in his tracks. The man in front of him raised his chin, fixing Kirk with an icy stare, looked him over slowly, measuringly, and turned at last to the fat Vulcan.

"Seleek...this - " he nodded in Kirk's direction, " - is my new slave?"

Seleek swallowed nervously, and nodded. "He comes from beyond the mountains, Lord, that is why he looks so strange. They are unusual in appearance in those parts."

Spock turned his cold glance back to Kirk. "And in custom also, to call their masters by name, without any title." He moved closer to Kirk, eyes never leaving his. "What is your name, slave?" His voice was remote, colder than ever.

Kirk's eyes lit with appreciative amusement. He couldn't figure how Spock had got in this situation any more than he, himself, had. Nor could he tell why Spock was pretending not to know him. He must have a good reason. Certainly he, Kirk, was willing to play along with him. His eyes met Spock's; joyful laughter shining out at his friend.

"My name is...Kirk...Lord." Strange, why had he not said 'Jim'?

Spock raised an eyebrow. "You appear to find something amusing, Kkirk. I wonder what? Seleek!" He spoke over his shoulder, eyes still resting on Kirk. "Take this Kkirk - " again the slight hesitation over the name, " - see that he is suitably cleaned, and robed, and then he may attend me. You will find me in the library." Turning, he made his way quietly up the passage, disappearing into the shadows from which he had emerged.

Kirk's three companions relaxed visibly with his passing, and it came to Kirk, with a jolt, that they regarded Spock as a hard master. But how could they? This was Spock. How did they know him at all, come to that? Sighing with this further puzzle, he became aware that Saleek was speaking to him, instructing him to follow him, and dismissing the two Vulcan stalwarts to their duties.

Obediently, Kirk followed, and was led through several passages. He glanced around him curiously, catching glimpses through half open doors of several people - slaves? - going about everyday tasks. Tantalising aromas coming from one of the doors brought home to him how hungry he was, and worse, thirsty. He had to have a drink.

"Er, excuse me." His voice sounded rather too hesitant for his liking, and obviously the Vulcan didn't think much of it either, for if he heard it, he took no notice.

Purposefully, Kirk strode swiftly forward, tapped him on the shoulder. "Mr. Seleek, a moment, if you please. Where can I get a drink?" He levelled his eyes at Saleek, who turned to look at him in some surprise.

"There will be time for you to eat and drink later," he replied rather huffily. "The Lord has said that you are to attend him. He is not one to be kept waiting, and you can hardly attend him in those strange garments."

Just for a moment, confusion, weariness and thirst almost made Kirk lose his temper. He moved rather menacingly towards Saleek, who backed away in alarm, looking round for assistance. Kirk stopped, but his chin was up, and, unknowingly, the Vulcan saw the full power and authority of a Starship Captain in this stranger's eyes. Petulant but shaken, he beckoned Kirk into the room from which the savoury smells were issuing, and clapped his hands.

Three women and two men looked up politely as they entered, and one of the women came over to them.

"This man -- " Saleek waved a rather disdainful hand in Kirk's direction " -- is M'Lord's new personal slave. As you can see, he is a man of consequence, and is to be treated as such. As My Lord's Steward, I am about to find him suitable apparel, but first he desires that you give him a drink."

Kirk found himself the focal point for six pairs of dark Vulcan eyes. Quite unabashed, used to having the attention of more than six people, he smiled round at them. "And some food, if you please," he said firmly, turning a quelling look on the steward.

The elderly cook bowed slightly to Kirk, who bowed back gravely. Turning to one of the men, she instructed him in the curiously basic, old-fashioned Vulcanese which this household used, to bring food and drink.

"Where will you eat?" she enquired. Kirk opened his mouth to reply, but Saleek jumped in before him.

"He will eat in here, and quickly," he snapped. "Lord Spock is waiting for him, and must not be kept waiting long."

The occupants of the kitchen all seemed to agree with this sentiment, and scurried round, bringing Kirk a cool drink and a bowl of what looked like stew. Thanking them gratefully, he sat on a stool and drank deeply. His thirst quenched, he began to eat the stew hungrily. He was aware of covert glances as he ate, but when he looked up the other eyes dropped. He was not surprised by their curiosity; after all, he didn't suppose they had often seen a Human before.

The steward was deep in conversation with one of the women, as fat as himself, and Kirk turned his whole attention to the meal. Too hungry before to notice, he suddenly became aware that the stew consisted of vegetables, as was customary on Vulcan, and...meat. Puzzled, he looked up to find that Saleek, his conversation finished, had come to stand by him, and was tapping his foot impatiently. Kirk finished the last of the stew and got to his feet, stretching. He handed the bowl and cup to one of the men.

"Thank you, that was good. How is it, though, that meat is eaten here, in the kitchen, when Sp...that is, Lord Spock does not himself eat meat?"

He was aware of a puzzled silence. Saleek took him by the arm, and, half leading, half pushing him, guided him into the passage. "You talk too much, and in riddles," he grumbled. "And to think we took you for a deaf mute! How should you know what Lord Spock eats, you've never seen him before today. Of course he eats meat; whyever should he not?"

Kirk passed a despairing hand over his face. This constant stream of puzzling and confusing events was becoming too much for him. I must be in the middle of a nightmare, he thought. Something told him that this was no dream, though. I wish it were, he told himself, and that I'll soon wake up and find myself back on the Enterprise, back in my cabin, with Spock... Spock, he mused.

Now there was a real puzzler. How had he got there? Why had they not gone together? How did these people all know him, and yet think they served him?

I seem to be doing a lot of sighing, he thought, giving an extra deep one and following Saleek into what looked like a primitive bathroom:

The steward beckoned to him. "You will bath here," he informed him. "This is where the higher servants take their baths. In this alcove there is oil for cleansing. I will bring you fresh clothes. Do not attempt to escape. You would only be recaptured, and this time I would inform Lord Spock, who would punish you most severely."

Kirk eyed the fat Vulcan with dislike. Food and drink had restored his spirits considerably. "Well, what are you waiting for? Surely you cannot wish to be my bath attendant?"

The other drew himself up indignantly. "You go too far," he said. "Much too far. I am waiting for your clothes. I will destroy them, and bring you proper ones."

"Like hell you will!" shouted Kirk, just stopping himself from throwing his arms protectively round his beloved uniform. "These clothes are all right. I'll take a bath." He looked longingly at the clear water. "But I'll put these back on. I'm damned if I'll walk around looking like a Japanese Geisha Girl."

Saleek suddenly looked weary. His face loosened and aged. "Please," he begged, tiredly. "I have had a long and weary day. I promise you your clothes will be cleaned and returned to you. No harm will come to them. I will bring you a plain white gown...and sandals. You cannot continue to wear those boots in the house."

Kirk grinned appreciatively. "No. I suppose they wouldn't go with a kimono. Oh, very well, only make sure that it is plain...and what about soap and towels?" he shouted after Saleek's rapidly retreating back. He was soon to learn that he needed neither. The oil, rubbed into his dusty body, acted like soap, and the water, a natural stream flowing right through the bath chamber, was so hot that he steamed dry in seconds.

He sat at the edge of the hot running stream, feeling at peace for the first time that day. Refreshed outwardly and inwardly, he was cheered by the knowledge that shortly he would see Spock, and together they would sort out this crazy situation, find a way to return to the Enterprise.

When Saleek returned, Kirk smiled quite pleasantly at him, and dressed in the white shorts and kimono-like tunic which fastened with a leather tie belt. They were cool and comfortable to his over-heated body, not unlike clothes he had sometimes worn on his visits to Spock's home. The sandals fitted exactly, making him think that Saleek was probably a very efficient steward, despite appearances. Handing him a stiff hairbrush, the Vulcan stood watching as Kirk ran it over his damply curling hair.

"Will I do?" He grinned, handing the brush back. "Am I now fit to enter My Lord's elevated company?"

The other didn't reply, merely rolled his eyes heavenwards, expressively, and jerked his head for Kirk to follow him. He was impressed, though, in spite of himself by this strange new slave's air of natural elegance. You could easily take him for the Master of the house rather than one of its slaves, he mused. I hope he keeps his tongue in check with M'Lord...don't envy him if he doesn't.

More passages, wider now, more stately. Woven rush carpets covering the red stone floors. Rich woven tapestries on the walls. Eventually, a door of smooth cedar-like wood, in front of which the steward halted, and knocked.

The familiar voice bade them enter, and Kirk followed Saleek into a wide airy room. Under the long window at the far side of the room was an elegant table fashioned from red Vulcan marble, its feet shaped like the paws of a wild mountain sehlat. At the table, writing with an old-fashioned quill pen, sat Spock.

Again the cold appraising stare, then the eyes moved sideways to Saleek. "You may leave him here with me. I will teach him his duties." Nodding dismissal he turned back to Kirk. "Come here, Kkirk," he ordered.

There it is again, Kirk noticed. The slight stressing on the first letter of his name. The instant the door closed behind Saleek he hurried to his friend.

"Spock..." His voice was full of puzzled affection. "Whatever is going on? How have we got into this mess? Who do these people think you are? How do we get back home? I hope you've got the answers, Spock, because I'm completely at a loss."

Spock regarded him across the table, his face filled for a moment with confusion and wariness. The puzzlement vanished almost instantly, replaced with

an icy coldness that chilled Kirk's heart with foreboding.

Coming round from his desk, Spock walked over to him and stood directly in front of him. "I do not think that you are mad." Hard, searching eyes bored into Kirk's. "Yet I can find no logical reason why a sane man should court the anger of his master as you are doing. I give you warning, Kkirk, I will take insolence from no man, certainly not from a slave. If you do not know how to behave respectfully towards me, then I must teach you. I do not think that you would enjoy the teaching."

Kirk returned the cold gaze with a growing apprehension, only partly due to the other's words. Something was wrong here. Very wrong. What was it? On the fringe of his mind the answer hovered, receded, maddeningly eluding him. He dropped his eyes in an attempt to concentrate. God, what was it that so troubled him, setting off alarm bells, warning him. Warning of what? In desperation he raised his eyes, looked directly, levelly into Spock's. The solution hit him with a sick shock of fear. Involuntarily he took a step forward, stood almost touching Spock. Surely he must be wrong? No, he had made no mistake.

"You are not Spock," he whispered, voice hoarse with tension. "Not my Spock. I could not have looked thus into my Spock's eyes. When we stand up together, I have to look up into his eyes, not level, as we are now. He is taller than I am. You... We...are the same height."

The realisation that this, after all, was not his friend proved the last straw for Kirk. Coming as it did on top of a day of total disorientation and confusion, it was a bitter blow. The bitterness exploded into furious anger. Reaching, he grasped hold of Spock...who was not Spock, shaking him. "Who the hell are you?" he yelled at the top of his voice.

He learned then that this man had all of Spock's strength, if not his height. The fingers that gripped his arm, holding him at arm's length, had the unyielding power of steel. Many times he had been witness to Spock's super-human strength, but never had he been on the receiving end. He gasped in pain and, surprisingly, the grip slackened.

When he was able to look at 'Spock', the brown eyes were not, as he had expected, angry but full of the same puzzled confusion that he felt. The Vulcan reached and turned Kirk's arm, inspecting the already darkening marks where he had gripped him.

"You ask me who I am. Yet it is in my mind that that question would come better from me. You are as tall as I am, and broader, stronger in build; yet I am able to hold you off, easily, with one hand, and though I held your arm lightly it is dark with bruises. Added to which - " moving closer, he peered at him lengthily, " - you are strange in appearance. Your ears are stunted, unformed. Your brows follow the line of your eyes in a most peculiar manner. You are not one of our race, nor are you from over the mountains. In truth, you do not look like a slave, nor yet like a Vulcan."

Suddenly Kirk felt sorry for the puzzled man in front of him. He had certainly got more than he bargained for in his new slave. Fleetinglly he wondered whatever had become of the real slave whose place he was so helplessly filling. The humour of the situation struck his highly developed sense of the ridiculous, and he burst out laughing. Once unleashed, he found his laughter hard to control. Not surprisingly, after all he had gone through, he heard a touch of hysteria creeping into it. Exercising strong control, he stopped, wiping tears from his eyes with an unsteady hand.

'Spock' was watching him closely.

"Are you mad?" he questioned when Kirk had stopped. "I have never experienced such lack of respect, such amazing behaviour from a slave, in my life. Don't you fear that I will have you flogged for laughing in your master's face like that?"

Kirk ran his hand over his face, sniffed back the last of his tears. "I am

sorry," he answered simply. "You must be almost as confused as I am. You asked who I am, but you answered yourself. I am neither slave nor Vulcan. I suppose I have somehow, through the influence of that blasted Compton's Hazard, crossed into some alternate universe..."

Impatiently, 'Spock' interrupted him. "You are talking in riddles." Moving over to his chair, he sat heavily, in the manner of one who badly needed the support. He jerked his head towards a stone bench at the foot of his chair.

"You may sit. I want to hear who you are and where you come from. I would be grateful if you could tell me in a sane, intelligible, respectful manner."

Kirk sat, gratefully, and told him. Told him about his ship and its mission. About the Hazard and his agonizing headache. Described in detail his arrival on Vulcan and subsequent events. Lastly, told him about his crew, and Spock. And here he chose his words with care.

"So now you see how I mistook you for my Spock. You are almost identical apart from the height and your slight stammer."

While he had been speaking the other had listened quietly, attentively. He got up now, and paced the long room. Eventually, returning to Kirk, he stood looking almost sympathetically at him. Kirk rose also to face him.

"I think you must be sick." Spock's voice was low, almost soft. "Perhaps the sun is stronger in these parts than where you come from. I asked you not to speak in riddles, and yet you talk madly of voyaging through the sky? Like birds? Surely you do not really think that men could leave the ground and soar in the sky? You say you have come from a far distant star - from one of the pinpoints of light we see at sunfall? I did not think you mad despite your strangeness, but I fear you must be, after all."

Not an alternate universe, thought Kirk. Extremely unlikely that there would be one that hadn't even discovered manned flight, let alone spaceflight. What, then? He decided to be diplomatic.

"My Lord." He watched the other man's eyebrow rise in an exact likeness of his own Spock's, bringing a sudden lurch of longing. "Truly I am not mad. What I am going to ask you may..." A sudden loud noise of a gong being struck interrupted him. 'Spock' moved towards the door, gesturing Kirk to follow.

"That is the evening meal gong. Attend me... A moment," his eyes as cold and hard as when first Kirk had met him. "I do not know what we are to do with you - that can wait. But I warn you, if you breathe one word of this nonsense to my family or to your fellow servants, you will deeply regret it."

He stood waiting, and Kirk realised he was waiting for him to open the door for him. Obediently he put a hand on the handle, then paused, and took up where he had left off. "I give you my word, Sp...M'Lord, I will not mention it to anyone...but please...before we leave...tell me, what year is it? No - please, I am coming. Just tell me your date. Please." When Kirk used that tone, there were very few in the Galaxy who could refuse him. Reluctantly the other halted.

"Oh, very well, I will humour you, if it will make you open the door." His voice altered, slowed, as though speaking to a backward child. "The year that we are travelling is the thirtieth after the passing of Surak the Great. Now open that door, Kirk, immediately."

Kirk obeyed, numbly. No, he had not moved to some other universe in the Quantum. He had stayed right here, in his own. Only somehow that damned Hazard had shot him to Vulcan. Vulcan of nine hundred years ago. Vulcan of Spock's ancestors. This Spock, in fact, was one of those ancestors. Not Spock, as he had been so delighted to think. Not an alternate Spock either. Not Spock at all, his Spock, but his great-great-many times great-grandfather.

The rest of the day passed in a haze of unreality. He was only half aware of following 'Spock' to a large hall hung with tapestries and blazing with the

light of hundreds of red candles. At an enormous table, capable of seating at least thirty persons, this evening only six were present. The other half of his mind was occupied with retracking the events of the day, and trying, with little success, to make sense of them.

As 'Spock' seated himself at the head of the table, Kirk quickly moved to push in his chair. He supposed he had better act the part of a well-trained slave, for this evening at least. Tomorrow, he thought tiredly. Tomorrow, perhaps, will bring some enlightenment - for tonight he was too weary to think straight. He longed desperately for bed and sleep.

The meal progressed uneventfully. 'Spock' said very little. The few remarks he did make were mostly to an older woman sitting at his left hand, to whom he referred as Mother. Next to her sat the young boy Kirk had seen earlier. He realised with a jolt that of course this must be 'Spock's' son. No wonder memory had nagged at him before. The youngster was just how his own Spock would have looked, as a boy. Occasionally 'Spock' addressed a remark to the boy and also to the two other older ladies at the table. The last member of the small party he ignored completely, neither speaking to her nor, after the first brief, formal bow, even looking at her. And yet, thought Kirk, startled by her position at his right side and her youth, surely she must be 'Spock's' wife. Perhaps they've had a row, he mused, too weary to spend much time on it. Indeed, he felt he would soon be asleep on his feet if the meal lasted much longer.

The dream-like evening ended at last. 'Spock' rose to his feet, moving his own chair as his slave showed no indication of doing it for him. Frowning at Kirk he ordered him to follow to the sleeping quarters, and thankfully, handing the wine jar that he could not remember using to another, lowlier, slave, he obeyed, taking his place at the end of what appeared to be a ceremonial procession. A tall, elderly Vulcan led the procession, bearing a three-branched candlestick, the red candles glowing. Surely symbolic, as the corridors were well lit already, the same red candles, set in alcoves, all along. 'Spock' followed, and closely behind him the boy and the woman whom Kirk assumed to be 'Spock's' wife. The three older women brought up the rear with their various slaves. The small group diminished rapidly once the sleeping quarters were arrived at. Each door claimed its occupant and attendants. Soon all that were left were 'Spock', his wife and their two slaves. Thinking, if he thought at all, that they would all end up at the same room, Kirk was surprised when, stopping outside yet another ornately carved door, 'Spock' bowed stiffly to the woman, and hardly waiting for her to go through the door, turned, setting off again down the corridor.

Kirk had stopped, thinking this at last was their destination, and 'Spock's' wife passed very close to him. She was not specially attractive, but had a sweet face, he thought. He also thought that she looked unhappy. Sensing his scrutiny, she stopped, looking at him for the first time. Kirk's natural charm asserted itself. He smiled at her. For a moment she looked startled, affronted, then, her own gaze softened in response.

"You are the new slave, the strange one." Her voice was beautiful, slow and warm and somehow comforting.

So I am, he remembered. Tomorrow he must get this ridiculous slave business sorted out. Still, he didn't mind bowing to a lady.

"My Lady."

She smiled then, her smile matching her voice, soft and warm.

"I hope that you will soon settle here. It must be strange, being new." Becoming aware of her husband managing to make his impatience felt from some distance away, she turned and looked at him, no smile on her lips now, her face unreadable. Then with another swift smile at Kirk, she went through her door into her room.

"'Spock' had already entered his own room when Kirk reached it. The candle-bearer, after depositing his charge in a bracket on the wall of the square, rather austere chamber, was bowing his way out.

Kirk stood quietly, waiting for 'Spock' to speak. He had only one thought in his mind. Sleep. He yawned hugely. Turning, 'Spock' saw the yawn. Noticed that his slave was bone weary. Jerked his head in the direction of a small alcove in the far wall.

"You had better sleep in there. Tomorrow you will assume your duties properly. Tonight you had better go to bed. For this once, I will attend to myself." He made it sound like a great concession - which it probably was.

"Well, bully for you," Kirk thought tiredly, then realised he had spoken his thought aloud as the Vulcan's head shot up, eyes coldly questioning. "I thank you," he corrected himself, turning to go through the archway.

The other caught his shoulder, spinning him round to face him. His grip was hard and painful.

"I know you are weary." He spoke softly, menacingly. "But I will make no more allowances for you. First your crazy outburst before the Sunfall meal, then you dare to talk with my wife, keeping me waiting, and now you so far forget yourself as to leave my presence without bowing."

Kirk stared at him. The brown eyes were very hard, the long fingers painful on his shoulder. Comparison flooded his mind. Spock, his Spock, eyes warm with affection, haddsmindful always to moderate their strength with vulnerable Humans.

"I bow to no man." His voice was equally soft, equally menacing. "Why should one man bow to another?"

Expecting at least a blow, he was surprised to see some of the anger leave the other's eyes. "I am your master. All slaves bow to their masters."

"I told you, I am no slave. I..." The light from the candles dazzled him. The room swirled crazily. But for the grip on his shoulder he would have fallen. Dizzy, sick, he closed his eyes. Dimly he was aware of arms lifting, carrying; of softness and light covers. He swam through layers of fatigue to open his eyes, look up into a saturnine face.

"Spock," he whispered, and was asleep.

* * * * *

Space: immeasurable, uncaring, vast. So vast that Human minds cannot envisage it without explanatory parallels. Each single life, even in its own generation on its own small planet, as insignificant as a jiffy in the measureless sea of micro-matter. Taken in the perspective of the timeless, endless Universe, to compare one life, even to such minutiae as jiffies, is laughable, ridiculous. Better liken it to a snap of the fingers, ineffectual, unimportant, totally insignificant.

To the two men silently looking down at a third, unconscious on a narrow bed in a curving room on a powerful Starship, itself a mere speck taking on the stars, one life is the most important thing in life. Both would willingly offer their lives to save him. Both know that if he dies he will take the light from their lives with him. One's life is so inextricably bound to his that if he dies, that one's only hope would be to die also.

McCoy straightened, shook his head yet again. He was beginning to feel it would fall off, he had shaken it so much.

"I can't explain it. I've given him every test I know of, and some I didn't know of before, and they all throw out the same answer. Nothing wrong, normal, no malfunction." Eyes red-rimmed, he peered at the First Officer. "There is nothing, absolutely nothing, wrong with him. Heart, brain, blood chemistry, all perfectly as they should be."

Spock was anxious and impatient. "Doctor, a normal man, healthy in mind and body, does not lie in a coma like this. Perhaps..."

"No coma, Spock," interrupted the doctor, careful not to disturb the tubes and wires monitoring the somnolent Captain. "His blood pressure is too high for a coma, too high even for deep sleep, although not in itself abnormal. To all medical appearances Jim is in a light sleep state, such as we experience just before we waken. But come over here, Spock; look at this screen." He waited until the Vulcan stood beside him, then pointed to the patterns of the Captain's brainwaves moving steadily across the screen. "This is the only abnormality I have discovered. Even here, it is not necessarily abnormal, just rather unusual. See how regular these waves are? A little too regular for my liking. The sort of sleep that Jim seems to be in should normally produce dreams." He shrugged. "No dreams there; these patterns are too regular for dreams."

Spock watched a while in silence. "I see what you mean, McCoy," he said at last. "However, although Jim's sleep seems clinically to be light, it cannot be normal. We should be able to waken him if it were."

"I know, I know...it is a complete mystery. At least he appears to be in no danger. We must hope and pray N'Dela can throw some light on the mystery."

"I would prefer something a little more concrete than hope and prayer, Doctor." Spock's words were stiff. Although, shortly before, he had acceded to McCoy's request to go to the hospital satellite Eries II, where the Galaxy's most eminent neurologist was based, he had done so only reluctantly. He had, of course, heard of Dr. N'Dela, and his excellence. He had also acknowledged McCoy's certainty that physically Jim seemed normal. Logic, therefore, pointed the course to have him neurologically scanned by the latest equipment, and most expert specialist, especially when these were near at hand. For once, though, logic was failing Spock. He could not rid himself of the conviction that, contrary to all the evidence, the Captain's present state was somehow due to an effect thrown at him by Compton's Hazard.

At first sight, this assumption seemed the most reasonable, and Spock had gone straight from leaving Kirk in sickbay to carry out intensive research on all aspects of the Hazard. He had missed out nothing, had checked all sources, all information. Checked, and rechecked. Result...nil. No effects remotely like the Captain's had so much as been hinted at in the entire research. Reluctantly, therefore, Spock had agreed to change the big ship's course, and head for Eries II.

He was not happy with the decision, still feeling the Hazard was to blame. His one comfort lay in McCoy's reaffirmation that their Captain was in no danger. At least they were not, as they so often had been, fighting against time.

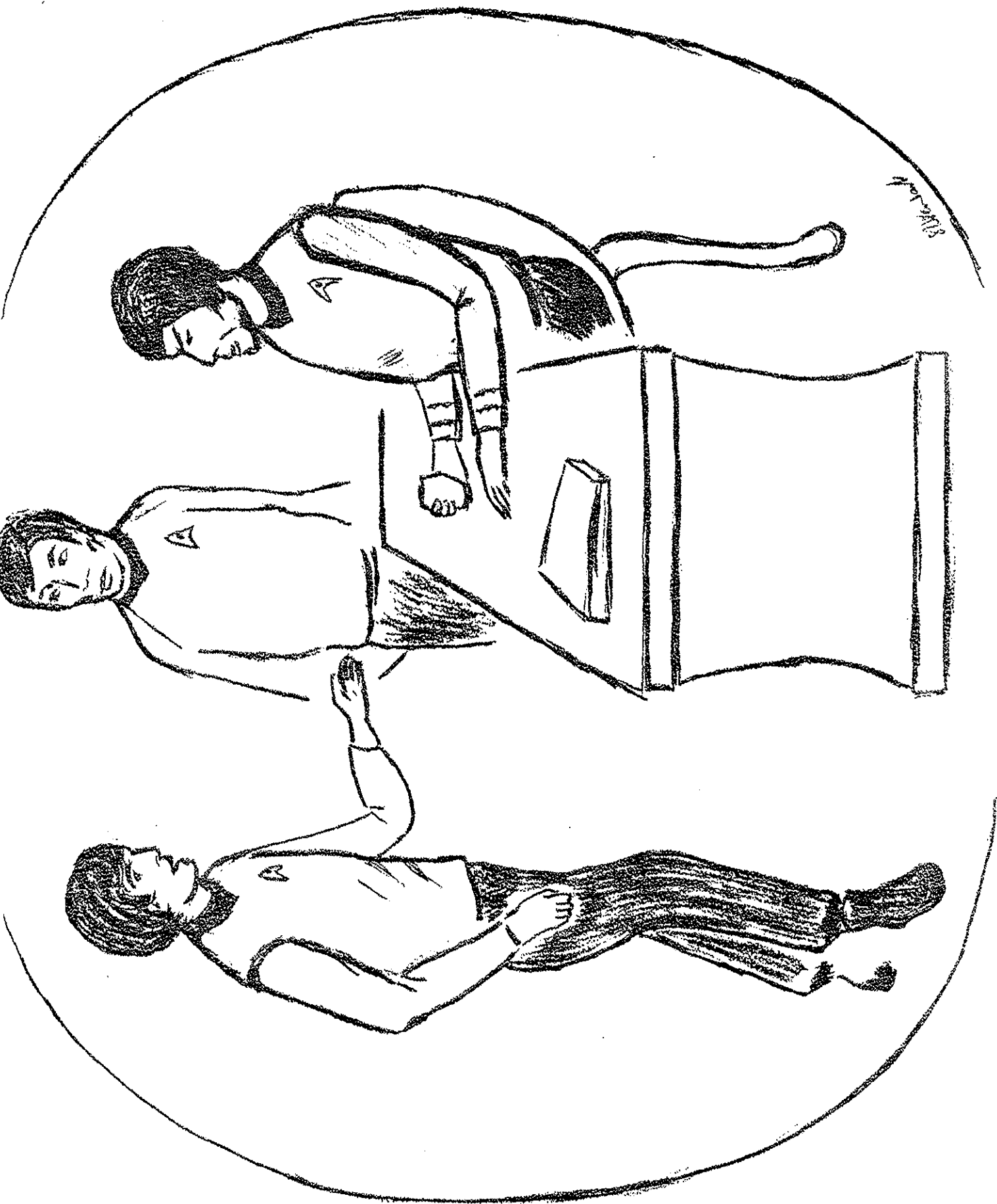
Leaving sickbay, he headed at last for his quarters. Since Kirk had been taken ill, now some twenty-four hours ago, he had not been near his room. He had not eaten, slept nor even showered nor shaved. Having remedied these last two, he punched himself some strong coffee, and sat huddled over it at his desk. Grief and anger washed over him, but he forced them quickly away. He would not grieve for Jim. That way only indicated that there was no hope of recovery. There was no way that he would harbour that thought. Not at this stage.

His buzzer, sounding sharply in his ear, proved a most welcome diversion. The small desk viewer showed Sulu and Chekov, solemn-faced, outside his door. Ridding them enter, he turned the dim lights up, and looked at them both silently. Nervously, the two young officers returned his look, also in silence. Suppressing a sigh, Spock forced himself to speak gently to them, reminding himself that they, too, as the rest of the crew, were worried and miserable over their Captain's mysterious illness.

"Gentlemen," he began quietly. "You must have come here with some purpose in mind."

The helmsman's sideways glance at his companion was as noticeable as a dig in the ribs, but Chekov, distinctly uncomfortable, only glared back at him. "It was you that said I should come to see Mr. Spock," he hissed. "You tell him." His tone clearly indicated his wish that he had ignored his friend's advice.

Sulu's eyes, almost as inscrutable as Spock's, moved from Chekov to his



superior officer. "Commander... Sir, Chekov told me something that I think you should hear. He is reluctant to tell you - he fears you will think him foolish."

"That's what everyone thought of my grandmother," snapped Chekov. "They laughed at her. Naturally I think they will do the same to me."

Jim would have been amused at this exchange, thought Spock. His eyes would have sought Spock's, alight with laughter. Spock felt no amusement. Only irritation, impatience and a deep weariness of spirit. His Human half was very near the surface, and he came close to making some icy, cutting remark to the young ensign shuffling nervously in front of him, then remembered how lightly, easily, Kirk would have dealt with him.

"Ensign." His voice was quiet, controlled. "I would be grateful if you could come to the point and explain why you are here. Perhaps we should leave your grandmother out of it."

"No, sir." Excitedly, the young Russian stepped forward to Spock's desk. "It is because of her that I am here."

Sulu also came forward, then, gently pushing Chekov aside. "Pavel, you may be a first class navigator, but you don't score too highly at explanations. Sir, about fifty years ago, Chekov's grandparents went on a trip from Earth to Saris Minor..."

"A silver wedding trip, sir, to see the silver springs there," interrupted Chekov, glaring at Sulu. "On the way there, they passed through Compton's Hazard, only now-one knew, then, that it was a Hazard. It was thought of as merely a patch of unstable molecular gasses. Just before they arrived at Saris, my grandfather complained of severe headache and dizziness, and eventually he collapsed. Similar to the Captain, sir."

Spock leaned back in his chair. Listened attentively, as Chekov, quite fluent now, continued.

"When they returned to Earth, without ever setting foot on Saris, grandmother, who was a wealthy woman, called in all the best doctors in Russia, but none of them could find what was wrong with him."

"Did your grandfather ever come out of his collapse, Mr. Chekov?" Spock's voice was so impassive he might have been enquiring about something quite unimportant, rather than asking one of the most vital questions of his life.

"No, sir." The young ensign hesitated. "He remained in a coma for many years, and eventually died...of old age, the doctors said..." His voice tailed off. It became obvious that he was close to tears.

Sulu touched his friend's arm in an attempt to comfort him. Truth to tell, he too could do with some reassurance right then. The thought of their intrepid Captain, surely immortal, laid low in his present state... Better not to dwell on it. "You see, sir," he took up the narrative, "the whole point is that, in her old age, Pavel's grandmother read about Compton and his discovery of the nature of the Hazard. Afterwards, she always maintained that her husband was somehow affected by it. Everyone laughed at her, as there were no records then - or since - of its causing such effects..."

"...but now, Captain Kirk is similarly affected, and we have just been through the Hazard...and I, that is, we, wondered..."

Spock rose and came round his desk. "Thank you, gentlemen. It is possible there may be some connection between our situation and what you have told me. We are so poorly provided with clues and I am grateful for any pointers, however unlikely they appear. Please remain available. I may have need of your assistance."

Quickly, expertly, he manoeuvred them out of his cabin, and himself made for the turbolift, and sickbay. He had not been happy with the decision to make for the hospital base. His new decision, though owing little to evidence, felt better. Jim would have called it intuition; said Spock's Human half was showing. Spock

preferred to call it logic, building a case under his surface consciousness, resulting in a feeling of agreement, correctness. What McCoy would think, and indeed say, when he was informed of the change in plan, was the question.

McCoy was not around when Spock arrived in sickbay. A nurse informed him that the doctor was expected back at any moment. While he waited, Spock went quietly into Kirk's room. Stood by the bed, silently, lovingly, watching the peaceful, sleeping face. The main light, directly above the bed, shone down on the still figure. Foolishly, Spock thought it too bright. Knowing he was being illogical, he dimmed its brilliance. If Jim had to lie sleeping like this, at least let him sleep without searching, glaring light on his face.

* * * * *

He thought that he had gone to sleep without turning his light off. Memory overtook him. This was not his cabin. This was Vulcan. The bright light dazzling him was the fierce Vulcan sun streaming through the window onto his face. He got out of bed, surprised to see he was still wearing the kimono-like tunic. Again memory caught up with him. At the side of the bed stood a small table bearing a bowl and a jug of water. A jar of the spicy-smelling oil that he had used in the bath-chamber stood next to it, and on a shelf above the table he found quite an impressive, though primitive, array of shaving tackle. There was even a mirror of sorts, made from polished metal, similar to early Earth mirrors that Kirk had sometimes seen in museums.

After making full use of all these commodities, he turned his attention to the tall narrow cupboard which, with a stool, completed the sparse furnishings of his room. He was not at all surprised to find that it contained several sets of clothes similar to the ones he was wearing. Whatever else it might be, this household which he had so unwittingly joined was an efficiently run one. As he changed into fresh clothes, he wondered to himself whether this efficiency was due to 'Spock' being a harsh master, or to the capabilities of the fat steward Saleek.

As if in answer to his thoughts, he looked up from tying his belt to see Saleek come through the door. No use asking him to knock, he thought ruefully. You can't knock on an archway. Ah well, I suppose it's too much to expect any privacy for a slave.

"So you're awake at last." The Vulcan looked less weary than the night before, but just as long-suffering.

"Good morning," Kirk replied brightly, surprised to find that he meant it. It did feel like a good morning. Sleep had restored his natural optimism. He felt more confident about finding a way out of his predicament. "Where is Lord Spock?"

"It is not for you to ask the whereabouts of your Lord," was the quelling reply. "As it happens, M'Lord rose long ago, and saw to his own needs. He left instructions for you to be allowed to sleep. Said you might still be affected by the heat... You look all right to me. I suppose you had better eat. Come, I will take you to the kitchens - then, perhaps, you will see fit to commence your duties."

Saleek had the strangest feeling as he showed the new slave the way to the kitchens from that part of the house. Absurd though it was, he felt he was escorting, not a slave, but an honoured guest. This man had an air about him of such confidence that it was all he could do to keep himself from bowing to him. To counteract these strange notions, he spoke brusquely.

"Lord Spock left word for me to explain your duties. He has been called to the Council Chamber unexpectedly." He threw Kirk an accusing glance. "Normally you would have attended him, but you were asleep. I hope you are grateful to him for allowing you to sleep. It was a very great concession."

Trying to look grateful, Kirk followed Saleek into the kitchen. The slaves there had finished their morning meal, but were as deferential as the night before,

and soon brought him food and drink. Until the steward came to sit beside him, the slaves chatted to him quite pleasantly. Less on ceremony with him this morning, they nevertheless treated him rather warily. As personal slave to the Lord of the house, he commanded considerable respect.

While he ate his belated breakfast, Kirk listened to the steward listing his duties. His title of personal slave more or less covered them. He was to attend to any needs of his master and be available, night and day, for his assistance.

"You had better follow his instructions carefully," sighed the fat steward. "He is a hard man, not one to be disobeyed."

Kirk lifted his eyebrows. "In what way hard? Do his slaves fear him? The ones I've seen look contented enough."

"The ones you've seen were mainly in the kitchen. They are Lady T'Kai's. My Lord is not cruel, as are many masters, but neither is he one to suffer fools."

"Like me?" questioned Kirk.

Saleek's face relaxed as it had the previous night. Now he looked quite kindly at Kirk. "Forgive me. I meant no insult. You are very far from being a fool. But you play the fool. You must watch your tongue, or you will be in trouble." Suddenly, unexpectedly, he laughed. "Funny to think we mistook you for a mute. You, of all people."

Returning his smile, Kirk got up, began to pace a little, as on his ship. Stopped in front of Saleek.

Saleek..." Hesitantly, he sought carefully for his words. "Last night... you said I had run away... Lord Spock thinks I am affected by the sun, and it is true, I am unused to such temperatures... Whatever the cause, I am puzzled by the events of yesterday..." Purposefully he trailed his voice, hoping the other would take up the cue. Obliging, he did.

"Don't you remember, you were brought almost to the house when you broke free. The slavebroker tried to catch you, but could not. He came to the house for assistance, and I ordered as many slaves as possible to search for you. A fine dance you led them. The sun had moved two notches round the fountain before you were found. Surely you remember all this?"

Kirk shook his head. "I remember nothing," he replied truthfully. "What of the man who brought me?"

"He could wait no longer. The transaction had long been arranged, he had already been paid." Remembering, Saleek looked sour. "He was not pleased when I suggested he pay M'Lord his fee back if you were not caught."

"So no-one here had seen me," mused Kirk, suddenly glad for the unknown slave who had, after all, escaped, who had found freedom at Kirk's expense.

"No." Again Saleek laughed loudly, much to the surprise of the kitchen staff. "If we had, we should not, perhaps, have been so eager to recapture you."

Kirk smiled politely at the heavy humour, but his thoughts were elsewhere. "Does Lord Spock know I escaped?"

"No." Saleek rubbed his chin. "No need that he should know. You would only start off by being punished."

Kirk looked at him, a little smile on his lips. "You are a kind man, Saleek," he said at last, his voice soft.

The other continued to rub his chin, in embarrassment, now. He looked into Kirk's eyes, basking in their warmth. Gave a little start.

"Oh, I am forgetting. The Lady T'Kai wishes to see you. She said she will be in the garden. I will take you there, and then I must get on with my work. I seem to have done very little since you came." Although he continued to grumble as he led Kirk to the gardens, his glance was friendly, and he gave Kirk an almost conspiratorial wink as they reached the formal gardens and, rounding a hedge of

brilliant yellow flowers, saw the Lady of the house sitting under a large, spreading tree. She looked up as they approached, giving them a pleasant, though unsmiling, glance. The young boy sat at her feet, idly running a small patch of red sand through his fingers. He looked sullen and bored, did not even glance at Kirk as he approached.

Remembering once more that he had no objections to bowing to a lady, Kirk did so. In return, he received a long, appraising look. Cool, but not unfriendly.

"Saleek - I was asleep when Lord Spock left this morning. I had not expected him to go to the Council today... Did he say when he would return?" Her voice was as lovely as Kirk had remembered, but sad, hesitant. She obviously did not want to ask the question, and from her swift glance downwards at the boy, Kirk guessed suddenly that it was for him that she asked it.

"Madame, My Lord was called urgently to the Chambers. He said he will try to come home early, but may not be here before Sunfall."

"Yes." She sighed a little. "He has much weight of work on his shoulders. Thank you, Saleek...you may go." She turned her slow, warm smile on the steward, watching absently as he bowed and made his exit.

While his mother had spoken, the boy had arisen and come to stand in front of Kirk. He looked about twelve years old, by Human standards. Kirk smiled warmly at him. Surely Spock must have been exactly like this at his age. A tiny, icy finger ran down his spine as he remembered that Spock, his Spock, would not be born yet, for nine hundred years. The boy looked surprised at Kirk's smile, but returned it shyly.

"You are free with your smiles, for a slave, Kirk." Stiffening a little at T'Kai's words, Kirk glanced at her. Her eyes were quite mild, though rather puzzled.

"Madame..." He stopped, remembering 'Spock's' order to keep a guard on his tongue. "Forgive me, sometimes I forget myself."

"You had better be careful with my father." The boy had a curiously deep voice, making Kirk want to smile again. "If you are not respectful with him, you will regret it." Leaning closer, he continued. "He is a very important man, you know. Head of the High Council, very wise...and very busy." The last words were so bitterly said that Kirk was dismayed. All was not well here. Lady T'Kai also should not have had such a sad face. She was far too young, and surely too richly endowed with life's gifts to look so sad.

Lady T'Kai came over to her son, put her arm round him. "Hush, Serek, your father must have regretted being called to the Council today. He will take you riding some other time."

"He said today." The boy was not to be comforted. "My tutor gave me the day off specially. He promised... He is always at the Council."

T'Kai brushed the hair gently off his forehead. "You must not talk so, my son. You forget your lessons. Remember the words of Surak, his wisdom and control..." She turned to Kirk. "He is disappointed. Normally, he is very good at his rules. My Lord told him he would take him riding...he did not expect to be required at the Chamber this day..." Stopping herself in mid-sentence, she wondered whatever possessed her to explain her son's and husband's actions to a slave. But this man was like no other slave she had known. He carried himself with an air of easy grace and assurance that surely could only belong to a free man. She blushed a little when her eyes met his. He was watching her with a quizzical smile at the corners of his mouth as though he read her thoughts.

Seeing her colour rise, he bowed formally. "Lady, if you will permit, I could take Lord Serek riding. I was brought up with horses."

Serek laughed. "Horses?" he exclaimed. "What are horses? Do you mean arantuas?"

Kirk laughed too in genuine amusement. This was one word that had changed

by Spock's time.

"Of course I do." He fervently hoped he did. "Did you not know they are also called 'horses' in some places?"

"Horses..." the boy repeated slowly. "I have never heard them so called... Will you take me riding, sir, really..." He stopped, confused. A slow blush like his mother's creeping over his face, his eyes fixed at some point past Kirk.

"Since when has it been the custom to address a slave as 'sir'?"

Jumping at the familiar voice, which even in its present coldness warmed his heart, reminding him as it did of his Spock, Kirk turned, met the eyes, so like - and yet so unlike. The hard gaze held his for a moment, then turned its cold attention on his son.

"I came home early to take you riding, as I promised. However, you will now forego that pleasure. I will not have you being familiar with slaves." Ignoring the boy's pleading glance and his wife's low cry of protest, he jerked his head to Kirk to follow him, striding swiftly away in the direction of the house.

Furious, Kirk obeyed. Behind him he heard the muffled sound of weeping. He wanted to turn back to them, comfort them. The knowledge that he could make matters worse for two gentle Vulcans prevented him. By the time they had reached 'Spock's' study, the room where he had been taken the previous night, he could keep quiet no longer. 'Spock' turned to face him, anger as great as his own in his eyes, but Kirk got in first.

"You hard, unfeeling sod!" he exploded. "Surely you know how much that boy was looking forward to going out with you. Just because he calls me 'sir' - "

"Be silent!" commanded the other, his brows drawn with anger. "How dare you address me thus? And explain to me why my son called you 'sir' just now!"

Kirk's chin jerked up. "Why should he not? A natural mark of respect from a boy to a man."

"You are a slave - his father's slave - "

"And therefore not a man?"

There was such depth of anger in Kirk's voice that the other stopped, surprised, despite himself. "I do not know what you mean. You speak in riddles."

"I think you know exactly what I mean. But I will tell you, just to make sure." His voice was so soft, so low, that even the most junior of his young ensigns would have recognised the danger signals. "In my time, and where I come from, slavery is an evil of the past. All men, all women, are free and equal."

'Spock' ceased his restless pacing, wheeling on Kirk. "Have you been speaking thus to my wife and son? Have you been filling their heads with your mad imaginings? That is why the boy called you 'sir' - you told him you were not a slave. I thought I forbade you to mention the subject to any member of my household."

"I have not done so." For a moment the two glared at each other; until, once again, the Vulcan's likeness to Spock struck Kirk. His anger faded, and when he next spoke, it was quietly, reasonably, as if he were explaining something to his friend.

"Please," he began. "I know that what I have told you must sound very strange, but if you will allow me to explain a little further, you may perhaps believe me."

The Vulcan had resumed his pacing, spoke without stopping. "My time is precious, not to be wasted listening to the ravings of a slave who does not know his place."

"It would not take much of your time. Surely you are interesting in hearing of other times, other worlds. My Spock would have wanted to hear about them. He is full of curiosity. Are you so very different from him? You look so like him; he is your direct descendant."

"Your Spock?... Ah yes, you mentioned some such nonsense yesterday. I thought you affected by the heat -- mad, even."

"Do I look mad?"

The other's cold gaze raked Kirk's face. "Noo," he acceded reluctantly. Seemed to come to a decision. "Very well. Yes, I am curious to hear more of your impossible tale. Please, though, try to be brief." He sat down at his desk, and Kirk, pulling up a wicker-type chair, sat also. Seeing 'Spock's' disapproving face, he raised an eyebrow questioningly. "May I?" His voice was polite, though the accent was of a guest asking permission of his host, certainly not of a slave addressing his master. 'Spock' sighed a little, resignedly, and nodded.

Slowly, haltingly at first, Kirk expanded on his account of the previous evening. Now, with the knowledge that this Spock belonged to a much earlier time, he tried to explain some of the progress that the centuries spanning their lives had brought. As he came to the Enterprise and his crew, his face lit with a glow and vitality which could not but impress his listener. Finally, as last night, he came to Spock, and now his eyes softened, turned inward-looking, as he explained a little of the character and courage, the intelligence and integrity, of his descendant to this man, responsible, long ago, for Spock's very existence.

When he finished, the Vulcan sat looking at him for a long time in silence. He felt equally as confused as on the day before. He could not bring himself to believe the extraordinary narrative, neither could he feel that this strange man with the fine open face and vast air of authority was mad or lying. Shrugging helplessly, he spoke at last.

"How can you expect me to credit such a tale?"

Kirk felt as if he had been kicked -- hard. Fool, he told himself bitterly. Just because this man looks like Spock, you expect him to trust you, to believe you... As he watched the other's face, however, his spirits rose a little. Not for nothing was he so familiar with Spock. He saw the struggle in the dark face before him, noticed the hesitation...

"And yet, I think you do believe me." He spoke softly, leaning forward eagerly. "At the least, you do not disbelieve."

Lord Spock glared quellingly. "If your tale is true -- and I may say I have never heard such a far-fetched, ridiculous-sounding narrative in my life -- if you speak truly, what do you intend doing about it? Are you resigned to staying here? Will you stay here, as my slave, or will you escape, as you say my real slave has escaped?"

Kirk thought quickly, his eyes on the other. "I do not know. I see no way that I can get back to my ship at present. Spock and my crew will be doing all in their power to find me, and if anyone can find a solution, Spock will... I must stay here for a while, at least. Even if you do believe what I have told you, I see that you can't suddenly stop treating me as your slave without setting your house at odds...so yes, I will stay, and serve you. I can see no way to end my predicament, but I will not cease trying to find one." His eyes softened as he left 'Spock's'; his voice dropped almost to a whisper. "I long to be back on my ship. I will never give up hope of returning, however long it may take."

The watching Vulcan saw the sadness cross the face in front of him, and sighed. "I do not know what to think of your account. It is so...unbelievable, and yet...you speak as one who is sincere. I must, however, ask you again to say nothing of this to any but me. They would not understand you... Have you already done so? To my wife...to my son?"

Kirk looked into the brown eyes, still cold, still remote, yet somehow, he felt, to be trusted. "No, neither will I. I give you my word. In exchange, may I ask something of you?"

The Vulcan's eyebrows rose alarmingly. This Spock, noted Kirk, raised both. "Slaves do not usually ask requests of their masters. You seem... Oh, very well, you may ask, at least. What is it that you require?"

"That you go riding now with your son. Your time is free this morning. You have said so. It is cruel to disappoint him so; foolish, also. He admires you immensely."

'Spock' rose from his chair, slowly walked across to the window. "You certainly do not speak as a slave. What I do with my time is no concern of yours." He resumed his slow pacing, spoke again over his shoulder. "I will go with him. He is a good boy, and I did promise him."

"Yes," Kirk spoke softly. "He is a good boy. He looks exactly as I imagine my Spock would have looked at his age."

"Your Spock..." Finishing up opposite Kirk, he looked piercingly into the clear hazel eyes. "Your voice when you speak of 'your' Spock is soft...and your eyes also. Supposing I believe that there is such a person as 'your' Spock... Are you fond of him?"

Kirk smiled a little to himself. "He is my dearest friend. Closer to me than anyone in the Universe."

"You love him that much?"

"That much - and more."

'Spock' continued to regard him, his look unfathomable, then, turning, went to the door. "While I am away, you might as well make yourself useful. My secretary is working in the third room along the corridor. Tell him I sent you to assist him. I take it that as you speak our tongue like a Vulcan, you read and write it also?" His voice was heavy with sarcasm.

Kirk only grinned at him. "Oh yes - my Spock taught me."

* * * * *

In the event, Spock had walked out on McCoy. It was a thing he had never done before, but he found he was unable to face the pleading in the doctor's eyes. As he had expected, it had been a painful scene, with McCoy first incredulous, then angry, and last - and worst - pleading with him to change his mind.

"Spock," McCoy had begun when he was able to speak. "I can see your reasoning. At first I thought the Hazard must be responsible for Jim's condition, but you have searched all possible records and come up with nothing...absolutely nothing. No-one has ever been affected by it in this way."

"Until now. In my opinion, Chekov's account is quite convincing..."

"Your opinion - pah! An old lady's rambling. Chekov's grandfather probably had some viral brain disease. I think this is the case with Jim. These virus strains often lie dormant for years until something sets them off. I grant you your blasted Hazard could have done that, but..."

"Chekov's grandfather never recovered consciousness, Doctor. Is that your expectation for Jim? Is that all you can offer me? At least by returning to the Hazard, retracing our steps through it, we will know that we have tested our theory. If Chekov's grandmother was right, we may be able to undo whatever harm was done. I find it too much of a coincidence that the Captain's mysterious illness struck so soon after passing through that place, despite what the records show."

"Coincidence? Coincidence, Spock? Surely I have heard you say, often, that coincidence is a law of the Universe. That related incidents are drawn to each other. Anyway, I told you, possibly the Hazard set the virus active. By altering our plans now, we lose valuable time. Time that N'Dela could be using examining Jim, perhaps healing him... Supposing we do return. What do you intend when we get there? If you are right, you could be putting everyone on this ship at risk. What if other crewmembers are similarly affected? Or what if, this time, the Enterprise - Jim's ship still, not yours - becomes one of those that vanish without trace?"

Spock drummed his fingers restlessly on the Doctor's desk. All that McCoy had said could be true. He could be risking lives, Jim's ship, Kirk's chance of recovery. All because of the theory of an old lady? Yet, was it only that? All the time they had been speeding towards Eries II, he felt they were going in the wrong direction. Until he had become so close to Kirk, watched, time and again, the Captain's intuition prove correct, he would have dismissed such feelings out of hand. This feeling was so strong, however, he could not dismiss it; indeed, it grew stronger by the minute. Jim, he thought, would have acted on such a strong feeling.

Right or wrong, he must stay with his decision, return to the Hazard. Pushing himself up from McCoy's desk, he looked round at the doctor. To his dismay, he saw that McCoy's eyes were full of tears. He stared speechlessly at him.

"Please, Spock." McCoy stumbled clumsily over his words. "I beg you not to return to that disaster... I have never begged you for anything before...but I beg now. Please...let us continue to Eries, to N'Dela."

Spock shuddered. Anger he could take, but not this. His own emotions were too raw, too painful to deal with such naked emotion from another. Turning on his heel he left McCoy, headed for the bridge. He felt he had kicked a good friend when he was already lying on the ground, knew that if things failed to turn out as he hoped, if McCoy were right, he would see the doctor's pleading eyes in nightmares for the rest of his life.

The scene on the bridge was not much easier. Apart from Chekov and Sulu, who exchanged a knowing look, his announcement was met by stunned disbelief. Uhura and Scott stared horror-struck at their First Officer. He returned their stares with stony silence. Scott was not long in putting his protest into words.

"I thought we were taking the Captain to the hospital satellite, Mr. Spock. Surely you're not thinking of throwing the poor laddie's only chance away? These new co-ordinates will take us to Vulcan. Whatever use will that be?"

Surprised, Spock realised that the Chief Engineer was correct. The change in plan would, eventually, take them to Vulcan. Well, if that was where they all thought they were going, all to the good. Time enough to tell them of his plan when he had to.

"Just obey instructions, Mr. Scott." He looked round the assembled crew. All returned his scrutiny with patient, though puzzled, acceptance. Knowing how highly they held the Captain in their affections, he made a great effort. Skirting Kirk's chair, he spoke from his usual post.

"Mr. Scott - all hands. It is difficult to obey instructions when they seem totally incomprehensible. I quite understand. Please - trust me. I can say no more, as yet...but you know I have only Captain Kirk's well-being in mind." Nodding stiffly at this unusually forthcoming speech, he reluctantly sat in the command chair, closed his mind to everything save the concentration necessary to his period of duty.

He could not close his mind for ever, though. That evening, back in his quarters, the doubts and fears came flooding back, haunting him, troubling his usually calm, ordered thought patterns. He stood under his shower, letting cold water pour down on him, trying to formulate a plan of action. McCoy was right; he could not condemn the crew, Jim's ship, to such a risk. He would take one of the shuttles and Jim, and go alone through the Hazard. Not quite alone...he'd need a pilot, a medical attendant. Well, there'd be no shortage of volunteers. There was no man, no woman on the Enterprise who would not willingly risk their life to try to save the Captain... And yet, even if he were correct and the solution lay in the perilous Hazard, could they hope to retrace the exact path they had travelled two days previously? It was a gamble, and Spock did not like to gamble at the best of times. Jim, now, he enjoyed a gamble, always confident that he could pull things off. And usually he could.

Sighing, he dried, dressed in a Vulcan robe that Jim had given him last time

they were on Vulcan. Towelling his hair, he went through to his bedroom, sat in his low chair by the raised fire-pit. He was bone weary, had not slept for two nights. Shivering a little, he pulled the robe closer, fastening the tie belt; leaned back in his comfortable chair. Relaxed now, his plan formulated, he was no longer able to keep the desperate fear, the overwhelming longing for his bond-mate at bay.

Closing his eyes, he heard again McCoy's remark, when Kirk had first been taken ill, and he, Spock, had been worried that he had failed in part of his bonding vow.

'By the same vow, Spock, if he had felt ill, Jim would have admitted it, to you at least. As I remember, that was what led to your bonding in the first place.'

Yes, dear Jim, thought Spock. Whatever has caused this illness, it was in no way your own impetuosity this time.

Once set in this pattern, Spock's mind retraced the time and events which had led to him and his friend becoming bonded. Returned to the scene where he had first tentatively suggested it.

It had been a very worrying time, he remembered. Jim had not been himself for some weeks, following the recent incident in which Captain and First Officer had almost come to blows over Kirk's impetuous decision to beam down alone to a dangerous and uninhabited planet. Had refused point-blank to give Spock any reason for his decision.*

The ensuing quarrel had so shaken Kirk that he had reversed his decision and, to Spock's great relief, had not gone to the planet after all. Later on, he had told Spock why he had wanted to go in the first place. Even after all the time that had passed since then, Spock still felt the sting of tears behind his closed eyelids at the memory of that reason.

After the incident was over, Spock had thought all was well again between him and his closest friend, but Jim had, most uncharacteristically, brooded for weeks, and all Spock's concern and extra gentleness had only made matters worse.

"I'm sorry, Spock," Jim had told him one evening when the two of them were alone together. "I know I'll have to snap out of this. I suppose I will, eventually, but I cannot forgive myself for all the times in the past when I have caused you worry through my thoughtless actions."

"But, Jim - " again Spock had repeated his by now well-worn argument, " - you never meant to be thoughtless. You did what you thought best at the time."

Usually this remark made Kirk go off into another bout of brooding silence. That time, however, he had jumped to his feet and paced the small room restlessly, turning to Spock at last, his eyes miserable.

"That's what makes it so awful. Don't you understand? I did not even know I was being thoughtless. Oh, Spock. If only there was a way to make me think more before I act. Before I cause you so much unnecessary worry and pain."

Spock had crossed the room; went to his friend, and putting his hands on Kirk's arms had spoken softly. Suggested what had long been his secret hope. What he had never dared to suggest before, knowing that rejection, however gentle, would be very hard to take.

"Jim. My friend. I do not want to change you, any more than you want to change me. I do not think you thoughtless. Only full of courage, and eager for life. But I cannot bear to see you unhappy like this. It is so, unlike you. Perhaps...if we were each to pledge formally to the other a vow to put the other's good before our own...I think that might bring you peace of mind."

"Formally, Spock. What do you mean?"

No going back now, thought Spock, and indeed, he had no wish to.

* Confrontation, published by S.T.C.C. in Fizzbin 17

"If we were to become bondmates, Jim. Spiritual brothers: Still common on Vulcan, originating from the days when the young warriors went into battle. They vowed to carry themselves always, to the best of their ability, to bring honour to their bonded brother. To think always of the other's good above their own. It is done sometimes also in groups, in which case the honour of the group comes first. When it is between two individuals, as I suggest it, it only occurs between two people who have the highest honour and respect for each other."

Kirk's own hands had risen, then, to rest in turn on Spock's arms. His eyes were very soft as he looked at the Vulcan.

"Spiritual brothers," he repeated quietly. "Yes, Spock, that is what I feel we are. Brothers of the spirit...and of the heart. You do me great honour. If it is what you want also, it would make me proud above all things to be bonded with you."

Half asleep now, Spock smiled to himself a little, remembering. He had been right. Their bonding had brought Jim the peace he had so desperately needed. Had also put the seal on the feeling which both had so strongly of belonging, spiritually, each to the other.

Spock sighed and stirred a little in the low chair. "Jim, Elandir," he murmured.* "Come back to me. I am lost without you."

* * * * *

The days were lengthening out into weeks, slightly shorter weeks than Earth's, as Vulcan was nearer to its star than was Earth, but weeks nevertheless. Kirk was not resigned to the fact. He had accepted that his situation would have to be endured, but would not accept that he might have to endure it permanently. He constantly wracked his brains to find some way out of this nightmare, to return to his own time, own place, but without any results. One thing he had discovered, however; and although it was of no help to him, it cheered him for a time.

About a month after his arrival, 'Spock' had sent him with a message for his wife. By now, thoroughly familiar with his new home, and its occupants' habits, he thought the most likely place to find her at that time of day would be in her sunken garden, some distance from the house. When he got there, he saw he had been wrong; the garden was empty. He walked down the steps to the well of the garden, and as he did so, felt a wave of recognition, so strong, he stopped, determined this time to pin it down. Frowning a little, he looked around at the garden, and in a flash he had it. The steps... In Sarek's house there was a room set in the middle of the house which was sunk lower than the level of the other rooms. It was quite a feature, and Kirk had thought it built as such, but this garden, and these steps... Supposing Sarek's room was built over a natural feature of the land. Rushing across the small garden, he scrabbled excitedly at the thick enclosing hedge. Yes, just about here, Sarek had a window. He pushed a gap in the hedge, peered eagerly at the surrounding hills, and whistled a little at what he saw.. He had been right. The view was the same as from the window of Sarek's room. This, then, was where his Spock's home would stand in the long-distant future.

Suddenly aware of someone behind him, he turned to see Lord Spock's young son staring at him in amazement.

"Kirk, what are you doing? You do look funny." The boy was trying hard not to giggle.

"Yes, I suppose I do. Well, as a matter of fact, I'm looking at the view."

Poor Sarek could contain himself no longer, bent double with laughter. "Wouldn't it be easier to go to the other side of the hedge first?" he gasped when he could speak.

* Elandir -- Vulcan word used in the bonding ceremony. Closest English translation -- Chosen Brother.

"Easier, yes, but not the same at all." Kirk's answer was quite true, but sent the boy off again, Kirk joining in sympathetically, and the two were just short of rolling around hysterically when Saleek came across them, sobering them up rapidly by telling them that Lord Spock was looking for them both.

Although it brought them no nearer to a solution, his discovery warmed him whenever he thought about it. He took to haunting the small garden whenever Lady T'Kai was not there, feeling a small comfort from its association with Spock.

As the weeks themselves began to stretch into months, Kirk became familiar to all the household, family and slaves. The slaves soon came to accept him. They hardly noticed his strangeness now. He was a slave, same as they were, a little different; sometimes rather sad and withdrawn, but pleasant and friendly enough. Life went on.

Most of Kirk's time was spent in serving and attending 'Spock'. With such proximity, he became increasingly aware that his 'master' was a deeply unhappy man. Cold and aloof beyond the normal for a Vulcan of Kirk's time, he stood out in his own time when Vulcans were much more openly emotional. He proved a demanding man to serve, yet, with all his coldness, Kirk soon came to realise that he was not by nature a harsh man. Many times Kirk's natural, irrepressible humour or openness of speech brought a frown of disapproval to the Vulcan's face, and many times he threatened Kirk with dire punishment. Not once did he carry out these threats. Not only himself, either, was singled out. He noticed that as he had thought at first, the slaves were well treated, content, in this household. A vastly different case from the lot of many slaves in some houses Kirk entered whilst attending 'Spock'.

He had heard from his own Spock, and had read also much about Vulcan's harsh history. Although the time he found himself in now, some thirty years after the death of Surak, was past its most savage period, much cruelty lingered, especially regarding the treatment of slaves. Kirk was deeply troubled by some of the scenes he witnessed, both in public places and in private houses. One such scene, and its aftermath, stuck in his mind, illuminating, as it did, the present Vulcan society and also much of the true nature of the man he served.

As was quite customary, Spock had been visiting one of his close acquaintances, a fellow member of the High Council. The visit was mainly a business call, and he had taken his slave with him to carry his scrolls. The two Councillors had settled to work after calling for wine to be served, and Kirk was standing idly and hotly behind his master's chair when the slave bearing the refreshment came stumbling through the door. The poor man was sweating heavily and seemed very nervous. Kirk felt sorry for him, wondered if he were new to this household, he seemed so ill at ease. He watched as the slave hurried to fill his master's cup, saw him slip on the polished floor, and moving quickly, caught him before he fell, although he was unable to catch the flagon of wine which shot up into the air, spilling the fragrant liquid over the marble floor. Kirk could feel the man trembling under his hands, but only for a second. 'Spock's' fellow Councillor leaped, furious, from his chair, seized the wretched slave and, with his free hand, beat him savagely about the head and shoulder.

Kirk did not stop to think. Sickened, he hurled himself between the two, pushing the slave out of reach of the other's fists. For a moment, the room stilled. Its four occupants stood quite motionless, like statues in a tableau, then, as if an unseen hand turned a key, all four moved at once. The slave crept, terrified to crouch by a chair. The master of the house advanced menacingly on Kirk, who, entirely forgetting that he was supposed to be a slave himself, stood, fists clenched, ready for him.

Only 'Spock' was in full possession of his senses. Gripping Kirk's arm, he quickly pushed him behind him, holding him so tightly that, struggle as he might, he could not escape. Calmly he faced his furious colleague, who had removed the heavy leather belt from his waist and was desperately trying to reach Kirk.

"Let me have him!" he demanded furiously. "Why do you shield him? How dare he oppose me? I'll kill him... Let me at him, damn you, Spock!"

"I apologise for him. He is new to our ways, and only sought to help your slave." 'Spock' moved, turning swiftly as the other reached, almost got a hand on Kirk. Half pulling, half pushing, he got Kirk, somehow, to the door. "I do apologise...most humbly...for him. I assure you, he will be punished. I would not want you to kill him - he cost a lot of money - but I will beat him severely myself when I get him home." Quickly, unceremoniously, 'Spock' gave Kirk a final shove through the door, hurried him along the corridor, through the main gate, and made for home, one hard hand firmly and immovably attached to Kirk's shoulder.

Somehow Kirk managed to contain himself until they reached the privacy of 'Spock's' study then, managing at last to free his arm, turned on the Vulcan. He was not quite quick enough, however; this time, 'Spock' got in first.

"You fool!" he denounced Kirk coldly, furiously. "Never let me have to do that again. Do you know you could be sentenced to death for laying your hands on a noble? Even for speaking out of place?"

"A noble! What is noble about a...a...brute like that? How can you stand by and let one man treat another in such a way? Do you think it right? DO YOU?" He thundered the words at 'Spock'. Put rough hands on the Vulcan's shoulders. Forced him round to face him, to see the tears of rage and anguish in his eyes.

For a brief moment, pain to match his own showed in the Vulcan's eyes. Then the familiar cold mask closed over his face as he pulled himself abruptly out of Kirk's grasp.

"You go too far. One day you will land yourself in great trouble. This is not the first time that you have involved yourself with what does not concern you... It is the way of Vulcan. You cannot change it."

Kirk had been staring blindly, painfully, through the window at the glaring red landscape. He turned quickly to 'Spock'.

"It is not your way, however, and you could change it...if you so willed."

The other turned away from Kirk's intense gaze, but not quickly enough to hide the trouble in his face. Swiftly, Kirk moved again, once more forcing 'Spock' to look at him.

"You are a Vulcan, yet you are not harsh. Many times you have said I deserve punishment...never once have you punished me. You told that...swine...that you would beat me, but you will not..."

A glint of grim humour lit 'Spock's' expression. "Do not be so sure. It would be no more than you deserve if I did. But I will not punish you. You are not a slave...you have said it yourself...and certainly, you do not behave like one."

"Do not try to fool me with such an explanation." Kirk's voice was soft now, with that dangerously mild tone that caused his crew, from its highest officer to its lowest midshipman to come immediately to attention. "It is not because I am not a slave at all. Never once have I seen you strike a slave. Admit it - to yourself at least - you do not like the cruel treatment many slaves receive any more than I do. I have watched you... Oh - " Again putting his hands on the other's shoulders he forced him to meet his eyes. "You are high up in the Council. So well thought of, so influential, you could do something to alleviate the condition of slaves...even be the person to abolish slavery on Vulcan."

'Spock's' eyes went to the hands on his shoulders, returned to Kirk's. There was no anger in them, only deep trouble, and again the hint of bitter humour. "Abolish slavery, are you mad? How can one man abolish something which is the very root of our society?"

"One man can change the future" - I once said that to your great, many times greatgrandson in a different universe to this... He hates slavery in any form...and so, I think, deep down, do you."

'Spock' had put an end to that particular scene by striding out of the room,

but Kirk knew he would not as easily stride away from the subject in his thoughts. He was becoming increasingly aware, due to proximity, and his knowledge of his Spock, of the complex nature of the man he served. He had been correct in his 'master's' feelings regarding slavery. 'Spock' did not like it in theory, although he accepted it in practice. He was a just master, and his slaves, while standing in awe of him, had no cause to fear him. Not one of them dared to speak to him as Kirk did, however. They would have looked askance if they had heard some of the things the strange-looking new slave said. Kirk never gave them the chance. Careful for 'Spock's' authority and respect, in public he treated him with the same deferential submissiveness as his other slaves. Only when they were alone together did he relax this attitude, and then he said exactly what he thought.

To his surprise, 'Spock' came to accept this with remarkable speed, after their first few days together. Apart from the occasional warning and raised eyebrows, he allowed Kirk to talk to, and treat him, as an equal. As the weeks passed into months and Kirk became ever more familiar with this Spock from the far distant past, his similarity to his own bondmate lessened. This Spock was not as agile and graceful as his, was slightly more stocky and, of course, there was the difference in height and the slight stammer. But it was the face that highlighted the main difference between the two. Spock of the Enterprise, even in repose, even in company, radiated serenity, the outward showing of a dignity which came from hard-won self-knowledge, self-acceptance. In contrast, Lord Spock's face was etched with lines of suffering, of tension, causing Kirk many times to wonder what the past had held for this man. He was, after all, a young man. Far too young to have such deep lines. He was rich, a respected public figure; had a charming wife, a fine son. There was something in his past, Kirk was sure of it, some sadness not to be spoken of. Some tragic event.

His own face, whenever he glimpsed it in the polished steel mirrors, was looking older. A measure of his strength of character, that he was making the best of his situation, he nevertheless ached constantly for his old life, his companions. During the day, kept busy by his work, he forced himself to hold tight control over himself, but many times at night, in the heat of the oppressive Vulcan darkness, he lay for long, anguished hours, desperately seeking a solution, a way back.

Worn out with his grief and his mind's exertions, he would, at last, fall asleep. His restless sleep did nothing to refresh him, and some mornings, after such nights, he would waken to find his pillow wet, his eyes heavier than before he slept, and knew that the tears which he would not allow whilst waking had caught up with him.

On the days following such nights, Kirk was very quiet. Thankful that his master, not a talkative man, allowed him his quietness. Once when his eyes were so heavy he could scarcely open them, 'Spock' enquired if he were sick. Kirk snapped at him so fiercely then that he gave him one of his warnings and never asked again.

The two men often spoke of Kirk's situation, though, when Kirk was willing to talk of it, and 'Spock' to listen. Although Kirk knew the Vulcan found it hard to accept what he told him, he listened with interest, asking many questions about the life of a time so far in the future, about the fascinating but surely impossible tales of travel, of adventures between the stars.

* * * * *

McCoy sat at his desk, idly stroking the pet tribble with one finger. His eyes were fixed on a medical report, his mind was far away. Each second took them light years away from the hospital planet. For the hundredth time he wondered should he have stopped Spock. He had the authority. His was the final decision on medical matters, and surely Jim's future was a medical matter. Why, then, had he not done so? Why allowed Spock to follow this new course?

The door reopened to admit Nurse Chapel. She was carrying a tray, which she set in front of the doctor, at the same time whisking the report away from him.

"Mustn't get this covered in gravy. Come on, now, Doctor. You won't go to the mess, so it will have to come to you." She sighed as she saw his expression. "There's no need to pull a face. It isn't plomik soup. Oh, come on, Leonard, eat it, please. You know what you'd say if one of your patients refused to eat." She went to the door, called over her shoulder, "I'll be back in fifteen minutes, and I'll expect to see it all gone."

McCoy pulled the plate towards him absent-mindedly. Yes, Nanny, he thought. He didn't notice her leave the room, taking the tribble with her. She knew he was quite capable of feeding the whole meal to the little creature; knew, also, the tribble would be more than willing to help him out.

Why? hammered away in his mind. Why did I allow it?

Because, sourly he answered himself, because, you old fool, you wonder; you more than wonder, you hope that perhaps the bond between them is guiding him. You believed in Santa Claus till you were ten, remember? Impatiently he forked something into his mouth and chewed. Words nagged just below his consciousness, finally surfaced; 'Love conquereth all'. Who had said that? True, the love between his two friends was something very rare and special. Images flitted across his mind...Anthony and Cleopatra...Dido and Aeneas...David and Jonathan... Alexander and... He pushed the plate away, surprised to find it was empty.

Nurse Chapel, returning, was surprised too. Surprised and pleased. Resisting the urge to tell him 'Good boy', she put a mug of coffee on his desk, taking the tray away from him. He was obviously deep in thought. Quietly, so as not to disturb him, she prepared to leave the room.

"Christine."

Turning at the door, she saw his blue eyes fixed on her, very bright and clear.

"What was the name of Alexander the Great's General and lifelong friend? His friend from boyhood?"

She thought for a moment, not seeing anything strange in his question. Thanks to her career, she'd long since ceased to wonder at the diversities of the Human mind.

"He was called Hephaestion... He died just before Alexander."

"Hephaestion, that's it. I remember now...how Alexander grieved for him... Yes, if he had lived, Alexander would not have died then, either."

She waited a while, but he had returned to his reverie. Quietly, she left the room.

Uhura sat holding the Captain's hand. She had sat in the same position for over an hour. Sickbay was very quiet. She heard, without being aware of it, the faint hum of the medical staff going about their duties. Heard also the faint throb of the big ship as it sped across the Galaxy.

Through an open chink in the door, she saw, without seeing, her friend Christine Chapel pass, carrying a tray.

She looked down at the hand she was holding. A strong hand, capable and sensitive. Gentle, too. Many times she had drawn comfort, courage, from its touch. Memory came to her of the time on Platonius when these hands had held her. Even then, controlled by the evil Parmen, the hands had been gentle. She thought of the kiss he had given her. She had kissed and been kissed many, many times. Most of those kisses had long been forgotten. She would never forget the Captain's kiss. She hoped she would be able to hold it in her mind, to re-live that kiss, on her deathbed.

Silently she bent over him, eyes searching the peaceful face. Surely it could not be wrong to kiss him now? If he were conscious he would not mind, would understand... He always understood. Leaning closer, she touched her lips to the beautiful mouth then, taking his hand back in hers, sat as she had done

before, patiently at his side.

Spock was sleeping the sleep of total exhaustion, deep and dreamless. The flames in the firepot flickered spasmodically, throwing the planes of his face into relief and shadow. Suddenly a different shadow crossed his face. He stirred restlessly then, eyes still closed, half sat up gasping; his hand shot up to his face, pressed in agony to his left cheek. His breathing was quick and shallow.

Slowly the rapid breathing became more normal. The hand dropped. He sank back in the low chair. His sleep became, once more, deep and dreamless.

* * * * *

Being 'Spock's' personal slave, exclusively attending his master, Kirk saw little of the rest of the family. 'Spock' himself saw them hardly at all, mainly at mealtimes, and gradually Kirk came to realise that something was very wrong with the family life of his household. At first he thought all Vulcan families lived insular lives, as his did, but, going with 'Spock' into other houses, he discovered this was not the case. In other families, husbands, wives and children mixed freely, and, although the foundations were being laid for the Vulcan way of life of his own times, and the beginnings of emotional control were evident, in general family life was warm and friendly, as on his own planet, Earth. Much freer, in fact, and to him more normal, than the family life on Vulcan that his own Spock had experienced.

On the rare occasions that his family met, they were very formal, hardly speaking except when absolutely necessary. Sometimes Lady T'Kai would attempt to speak more lightly to 'Spock', but was always frozen out, and to his knowledge their marital life was completely non-existent. With his son, 'Spock' was more easy, and when time allowed, took him riding and hunting, ~~talking~~ more freely with him and showing interest in his activities; but his wife might not have existed for all the attention 'Spock' gave her.

This, then, was where the trouble lay, and, Kirk suspected, was the reason for his master's coldness and general aloofness. Whatever could have happened, he wondered, to have brought them to this pass. That it was not of her desiring became increasingly evident. Many times Kirk noticed a look of longing on her face as her glance rested on her husband. She too, like 'Spock', had fine lines round her eyes and mouth which should not have been there, considering how young she was.

Lady T'Kai was unfailingly kind to Kirk on the occasions when they met. Indeed, she was thoughtful and kind to all who came into her presence. Many times Kirk's sympathetic nature was troubled by the sadness in her face. Many times he came near to asking her if he could help. He knew that he must not. To her he was a slave, her husband's slave. He had promised 'Spock' not to tell her, or anyone else, otherwise. Besides, he was never alone with her, had no opportunity.

Extra sensitive due to his own sadness, he could sometimes almost physically feel the misery of these others, and longed to help them both.

He discovered the cause of the deep-seated trouble by accident one very hot morning. The heat was so oppressive that even the acclimatised Vulcans were driven to seek any shade they could find. 'Spock', who, Kirk was rapidly discovering, was almost as thoughtful as his wife, seeing the effects the heat was having on his unusual 'slave', had dismissed him from his duties, telling him to rest. Wandering desultorily to his favourite spot, he threw himself under the high hedge which cast its broad-leaved shade over the sparse grass.

As he lay, half dozing, he became aware of raised voices on the other side of the hedge. He could not hear what was being said, and indeed the scene was not of long duration, but just as he was dozing off, again he heard the muffled, but undeniable, sounds of someone weeping. Wearily he dragged himself to his feet and went round to the other side of the hedge, to the sunken garden where a small fountain played, casting its hot water into the small pool.



Lady T'Kai was sitting alone on a bench of weathered Vulcan marble, weeping bitterly and uncontrollably.

Kirk forgot he was a slave. Forgot he was nine hundred years in this woman's future. Forgot the heat and his weariness. Crouching by the bench, he put a gentle arm round her shoulders.

"T'Kai," he whispered. "What is it? Let me help."

She shrank back from him in amazement and fear. "How dare you touch me? You, a slave." But her eyes, as they met his, pleaded for comfort.

Confused, Kirk leaned back on his heels, removing his arm from her shoulders. "Forgive me...I forgot...I only saw that you were very unhappy."

"You forgot? How can you forget that you are a slave? His slave," she ended bitterly, then continued in a low voice. "You are more fortunate than I. At least you see him every day...and he talks to you... I have heard him, when he has not known I was there..." Her eyes were suddenly sharp. "He does not talk to you like a slave...nor do you bear yourself as a slave should. Are you a spy? Has he sunk to that? You are, aren't you? He has set you to spy on me... You are no slave. That is written all over you... Oh, why did I not see it before?" Her voice rose hysterically, and Kirk, startled, leaned forward, taking her hands in his.

"Lady," he said softly, "I am no spy. Please trust me. I know, as a slave, I have no rights to touch you or speak to you thus, but you need someone to help you. Cannot you tell me your trouble? It will be safe with me."

For a moment she looked deep into his eyes, then pulled her hands from him. "I do not know who you are...or what you are...but you are no slave. I do know that, and...I do trust you. He trusts you too. I have seen him look at you... Oh, it has been a long time since he looked at anyone with trust...and that is my fault. Or so he believes."

The tale was simple, tragic and classic. Shortly after their marriage, 'Spock's' best and oldest friend had come to visit them. When she told him that 'Spock' was not at home, he had suddenly told her that it was she he had come to see. He loved her, had always loved her. Knew that really she loved him. He had come to take her away with him. Had prepared a safe house in the hills.

She had laughed at him, sure he was joking. Had found it was no joke when he lifted her, just as she was, onto his Vulcan steed, and galloped off with her into the mountains with such speed that she had been unable to escape.

After they arrived at his hideaway, she had managed to trick him, pretending she did, as he had said, want to stay with him. His guard relaxed; she had seized her chance, and the steed, and galloped back to the town, and home and safety.

Had she been given time to compose herself, all might have been well, but as she rode up the avenue of their home, she had encountered her husband, returned early to take her on a surprise outing. Distraught as she was, the sight of him opened the floodgates. Weeping in his arms, she told him everything and lived from then on regretting it. Beside himself, mad with rage, he had ridden instantly to the hills, in pursuit of the abductor. Finding him, he had fought and killed him.

No-one of the few people who knew the truth ever blamed him. All accepted it was the only thing he could have done, and a just end for his treacherous 'friend'. He did not share their sentiments. He had, and still did, blame himself. He could hardly live with the knowledge that he had killed his friend, and that that beloved friend had so betrayed him. Since that day, he trusted no-one, befriended no-one.

"And every time he looks at me, it reminds him," she finished. "Even now, ten years later, I cannot be easy with me. Our life together as man and wife ended that day. Now I feel a total stranger to him. Oh, I try. I often try, even now, to talk, to reason with him. Even this morning, to beg him to try again, but it is to no avail...and yet, he is so unhappy. I long to comfort him, to be as we

were... I love him so, more now than even then, more as each day passes..."

"Have you told him that?"

Startled, she looked at him. "I would not dare...I do not think I could bear rejection of that." She sighed deeply. "I only tell him how foolish he is to keep so to himself, to hold on to his grief and guilt all these years...and yet he seems to trust you, to talk to you as he has done to no-one else since that day."

Rising, she put her hands on his shoulders. "What is it about you that makes him trust you so? And me confide in you? Who are you? You are not one of us; where do you come from?"

Gently, Kirk moved her hands from his shoulders. "I am...what I am. Lady, with your permission I will talk with him... Oh, I know, you fear his reaction if he discovers that you have spoken with me on such matters... Don't be afraid, I will be careful. He does talk to me, as you have said. Maybe he will listen also. Trust me."

Their eyes held for a long while. Then, sighing again, she nodded. "Yes, I trust you." A quick smile lit her face. "Indeed, I trust you, Kirk. There is something about you that cries to the whole world that you are to be trusted. Very well; speak with him. And...I thank you - but walk carefully. He is not by nature a violent man, but when his anger is roused, he is terrible. I would not want you to end the same way as his other friend."

Kirk bowed, returning her smile. "I will go to him now, in his library... and - Lady T'Kai, when you see him...tell him you love him."

Lord Spock was sitting at his desk, signing a scroll, when Kirk entered. Although the morning was still young, it was very hot, even indoors, even to a Vulcan. He was feeling the heat unusually this morning. That, and the scene with his wife, had made him very restless. The old memories haunted and tortured him more than ever.

The eyes he lifted to Kirk were hooded and shadowed, but could not prevent some of the anguish he felt from showing. Kirk paused in front of the desk. He had been wondering how to begin, what to say. Now, looking into the guarded eyes, feeling his pain, it was as if he were confronting his own Spock. Sympathy, longing to help these unhappy people, flooded through him.

"Spock, let me help," he said softly, as he would to his friend.

For a moment the Vulcan looked into those hazel eyes glowing with sympathy and friendship, and his lonely heart leaped to meet them, longing to accept their offer. Then habit and fear took over once more. Trust no-one, his inner voice told him. Then no-one can ever hurt you again.

He rose to his feet, eyes now cold and hard. The furious heat dragging at his body and mind. "What are you talking about? Why should I need help? Yours or anyone else's."

Later Kirk realised he made a bad mis-judgement then. Almost forgetting that this was not his Spock, he persisted; failed to think his words out carefully enough. "You do need help, Spock. You, and Lady T'Kai. I see you both, separately and together. Neither of you is happy..." Too late, he saw his error. He had said too much too soon. Furious with himself, he watched 'Spock' move smoothly and swiftly to stand in front of him.

"You see too much, my friend." The voice was very soft, very dangerous. "And hear too much, perhaps?" With his right hand he reached, seizing Kirk's shoulder, gripping it painfully. "Who has been talking to you - slave? Has she been pouring her troubles into your oddly-shaped ears, that you come thus to me, meddling once more in matters of no concern to you? I see I have been too lenient with you. Too free... Answer me, Kkirk." His voice deepened dangerously as Kirk stayed silent. The hard fingers bit deeper.

Mind racing, Kirk met the threatening eyes squarely. He must divert 'Spock's' mind from thoughts that his wife had been confiding in him. The solution came in a flash. Realisation of its danger to himself came right behind.

"No need for anyone to talk. I am not blind, you...fool, that I cannot see how things are between you." He caused his voice to rise, loading it with all the insolence of a Klingon Warlord. "I see that you never bother with her, as other men do with their wives. I see her sadness when she looks at you...I know you never go to her bed, as a normal man goes to his wife's..." The rage in the eyes so close to his stopped him. Enough, he warned himself. Indeed, too much.

The past, the overpowering heat, the day's bitter memories, and now the taunting sneers from this man he was beginning to think of as a friend, all converged on 'Spock'. Bone white, eyes glittering, he took his hand from Kirk's shoulder. Slowly clenched it into a fist, raised it...

Kirk saw swift death in the raised Vulcan fist, knew there was nothing he could do to avert it. Spock, he called in his mind, and it was not to this man that he called.

Some miracle caused the fist to unclench, and the blow, when it came, struck him across the face with open hand. Although not the killer that he had feared, the blow knocked Kirk off his feet, flung him across the room to lie at the foot of the great carved door. For a few seconds - or a thousand years - the whole Galaxy passed before his eyes, then, fighting sickness and dizziness, he looked up dazedly to see the Vulcan standing threateningly over him.

"Get up."

Shakily he obeyed, willing himself not to lift his hand to his face. His eyes met 'Spock's' with a bleakness that had little to do with the agony in his cheek and jaw.

"You are fortunate that I do not have you flogged. But I can think of a better punishment for you...my friend...who thinks he can walk on level terms with his master. You say you are not a slave. You show sympathy for slaves. Well, you shall have a day to rouse your strongest feelings for them. It may also humble you, show you your place." Opening the heavy door, he called to a passing slave. "Take this disobedient slave to the harvest fields," he instructed him coldly. "Let him earn his keep for a change. A day in the heat and toil of the mangol harvest may dampen his ardour for poking his nose into the affairs of his betters. He may return here at Sunfall... Unfortunately, I will have need of his services tomorrow."

Still dazed, Kirk followed the slave down the corridor. Unseen now, he raised his hand and rubbed gently at the fire in his face. At least his plan to channel his master's anger away from Lady T'Kai had succeeded...too well. The slave was saying something to him, but he could pay him little attention. His head was throbbing now in company with his face, and the prospect of a day spent in the broiling heat of the mangol fields did nothing to raise his spirits. Worst of all, though, was the knowledge that he had completely failed in his object of helping 'Spock' and T'Kai...not only failed to help, but possibly made matters much worse.

The merciless Vulcan sun beat down on them as they crossed the courtyard and gardens, and then the open road until they reached the harvest fields. Kirk remembered how, when he had first come to this god-forsaken land, the mangol shoots were just poking through the ground at the end of the Vulcan winter. Now they were a vast tangle of low shrubs, the purple mangols heavy under the prickly leaves, and another winter was fast approaching. Two seasons gone, and no nearer getting back to his ship than the day he had been dragged from her. Indeed, he thought bitterly, his friends must have given up the search by now, more than six Earth months later. Spock would have searched every inch of the quadrant relentlessly, leaving no possibility unexplored, but even he would be forced to admit defeat eventually. A thin tendril of warmth, of comfort, wound itself round his heart. Spock would never admit defeat, never give up. Six

months, six years, he would search against all odds until he found him, or until he died...whichever came first.

At last they turned in at the gate to the biggest field. The slave who had brought him explained the situation to the burly overseer; Kirk was given a basket and told to start his work. Why in the Universe don't I try to escape? he wondered. Surely he would stand a good chance of success. He was quick, well-trained, could outrun, outwit, the opposition with ease. If I did, I would never know what happened to Lord Spock and Lady T'Kai, he answered himself. Never be able to help them to come together again.

How noble you are, and how stupid, he told himself bitterly. You haven't had much success so far, and anyway, what does it matter to you?

Slowly he began to fill his basket, not bothering to reply to that question. It did matter, that was all. Even in this time, even with this Spock, it mattered. The bond was there. Not the same - never the bond that held him joyfully, willingly devoted to his Spock, but there nevertheless. No use to ignore it, to deny it. If he ran away, he would not be at peace with himself.

He had never experienced such unendurable heat. Even in the early morning the day had been scorching, now, as the sun rose higher in the sky, it became unbearable. Dimly, he was aware of the discomfort and misery of his companions. Too hot and weary to talk, they went about their task like robots, filling the big baskets and carrying them to the waiting carts. The punishment for slowness was subtle, and cruel. No whips here, but carrots for donkeys. Every time a slave filled a basket and took it to the cart, he was given a small cup of water. If he was slow or lazy, or just too tired or ill or hot to fill the baskets quickly, he got no water. Kirk was slow and weary and hot, so, consequently, desperately thirsty. As the day progressed, his thirst became unbearable. His face and head throbbed in unison, and his hands were covered with scratches from the spikes of the mangol leaves.

When at last a halt was called, he was too far gone even to feel thankful. He staggered back to the big house in a daze of pain and dizziness. Somehow he dragged himself to the bath-house, plunged into the water. Hot water. Everything about this evil place was hot. Wearily, he washed the day's sweat and grime away, put on clean, blessedly cool clothes, and putting one foot in front of the other, managed to reach his bedroom, thankful that everyone would be at the Sunfall meal, leaving the corridors empty. He could not have spoken to anyone. The thought of food made his stomach heave, and even the water he had drunk threatened to turn traitor. One thought only filled his head. To lay it down on a cool pillow and ease the dreadful grey dizziness. The light was still brilliant through his small window. He pulled the blind and sank thankfully onto the bed. Still his stomach churned. Still his head throbbed and spun.

"Spock," he whispered in desolation. "This time I may have reached my limit. Where are you, my friend...my friend of friends?"

It was not possible. Wonderingly, he looked round the austere, familiar room. His eyes devoured the familiar sleeping figure. How? HOW had he returned? He had lain down on his bed, sick and dizzy...and now... Impatiently he shrugged off his questions. Later for explanations. These he could wait for. Right now there was a more vital call. He could not wait for this.

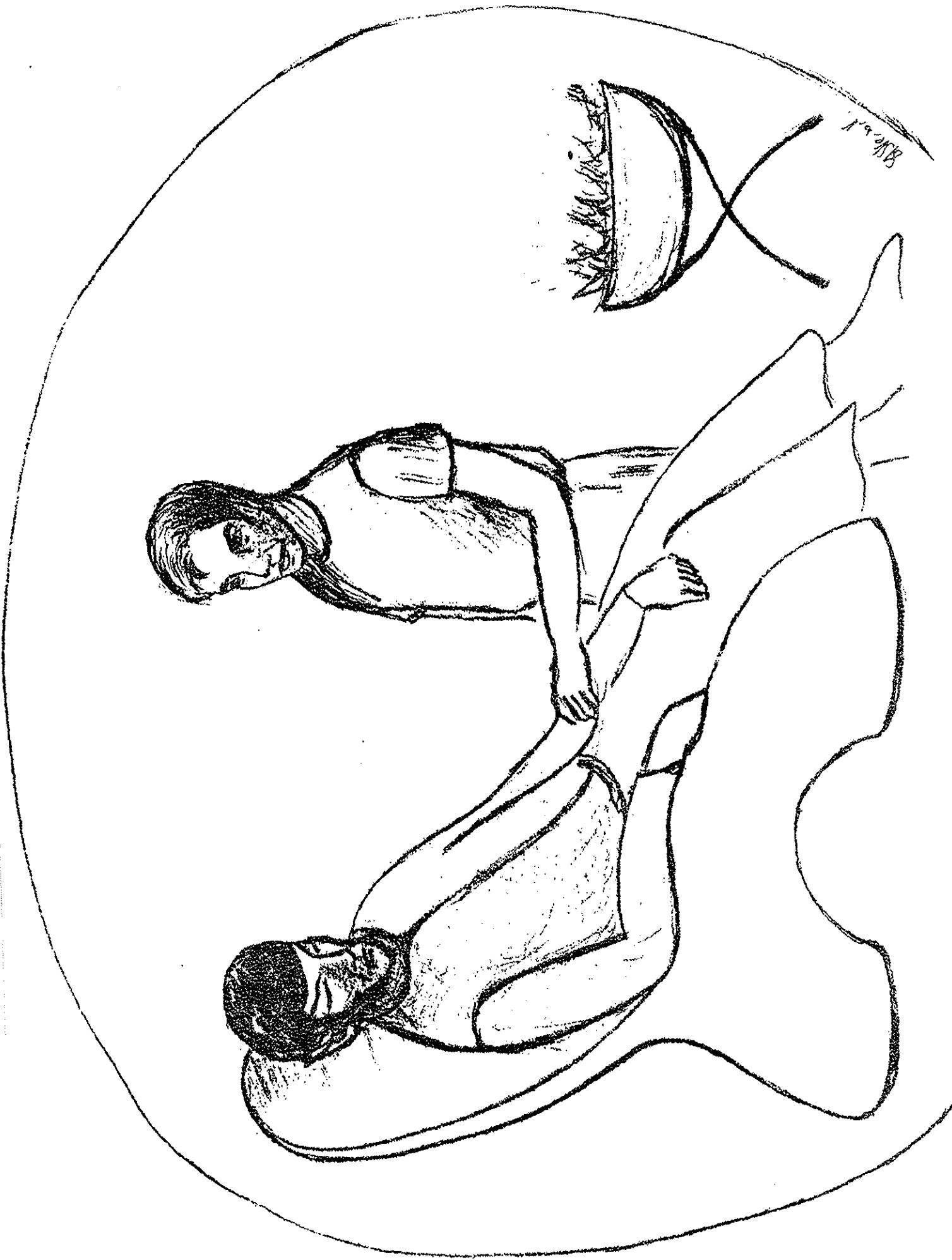
Swiftly, he crossed the room, knelt quietly by the low chair, put gentle, urgent hands on Spock's arm. Instantly the brown eyes opened. Widened in disbelief.

"Spock...Elandir."

"Jim? Jim...you are recovered?" Strong Vulcan fingers took the shaking hands, held them firmly.

"Spock... My Spock."

"No-one else's." The fingers reached to touch the beloved face, felt the



dampness of tears.

"Jim - what are you doing here, You are still sick; see, you are shaking! I will call the Doctor."

"You will do no such thing. It is not sickness, Spock. It is seeing you again after so long. Oh, Spock, sometimes I wondered, would I ever see you again?"

He did not understand Jim's words, only his need...his own need, also. He put his arms round him, held him close. Tenderly stroked the soft hair, calmed the violent shaking with gentle hands, soft, low words. Slowly the trembling lessened.

"Jim, you should be in sickbay. Let me take you there."

"No need. I am not sick. See, I have stopped shaking now, thanks to you." Reluctantly he lifted his head from the comfort of Spock's shoulder, smiled up into the anxious eyes. The flames from the fire flared suddenly, illuminating his face.

Spock's expression changed from anxiety to horror. "Jim - your face. How... Who has done that?" His own hand shaking now, he held it against the bruises. His fingers matched them exactly.

His eyes glazed, went blank. He covered his face with trembling hands. "Oh, Jim... Dear Jim, forgive me."

Appalled, Kirk pulled the hands away from the face. "No, Spock. Not you. It was not your hand, Elandir."

Slowly the dark head raised, the eyes clear again, but filled with his own pain and the long-buried memory of another's guilt. "No, not mine...whose, then?"

"Hush. Never mind. Later for explanations." His turn, now, to comfort, he closed strong arms round the hunched shoulders. For a moment, Spock remained stiff with anguish, then subsided against him, sighing softly. They held for a long time, the only sounds in the room their soft breathing and the crackle of the low fire.

At last Spock lifted his head. "You really should be resting, Jim. After what has happened, you should be careful. Does the Doctor know you are here?"

Kirk smiled reassuringly. "Stop worrying. I am not ill. All I needed was to be back here, with you." And it was true - all his sickness and dizziness had left him.

He leaned back against the strength of Spock's arm. "It is so good to be back, Spock. Back on my ship, with you."

He must have dreamed, thought Spock, confusedly. Despite what McCoy had said, he must have been dreaming as he lay in sickbay. He could not give it much thought, though. Jim's presence, so wonderfully restored, his own deep affection overwhelmed him. He bent over him; lightly touched his lips to Kirk's forehead.

The gentle kiss caused Kirk's tears to flow again. He pulled away slightly to look at Spock. Gripped his hand tightly.

"I love you, Spock...do you have any idea how much I love you?"

Spock tried to smile. His voice shook slightly as he replied. "Some idea, T'hy'la... I have some idea."

The small room was full of peace and tranquillity. Spock had made Kirk take his place in the low chair, and himself sat leaning against it, eyes closed, half asleep. Comfortable and relaxed, Kirk drowsily watched the shadows the fire was throwing on the ceiling, one arm lying affectionately across Spock's shoulders.

Without warning, he was seized with inexpressible fear. Jerking to sitting position, he put his hands on Spock's shoulders, turning him to face him. Still half asleep, the Vulcan looked at him with puzzled, drowsy eyes.

"Elandir, what is it? What's wrong?"

"Spock. Link with me."

"Now, Jim? But..."

Kirk's hands were urgent, his eyes pleading. "Yes, now. Please. The directional link."

Fully awake, Spock covered Kirk's hands with his own. "We have never attempted a directional link, Jim. It is the deepest and most dangerous of all the links. I never suggested it in case it harmed you."

"We must take that risk. I trust you, Spock. You will be careful. You will not hurt me."

"I would take the utmost care. But, Jim...if you insist, then of course we will attempt it. But wait until morning. We will be refreshed by then by sleep, our minds more capable..."

"No. Now, Spock. It must be now."

"Why such urgency? Surely it can wait until tomorrow? It will be safer then. Come, sleep."

"It cannot wait till then. It cannot. We must link now. Please... I beg you... Can you refuse me?"

Spock sighed resignedly. "You know I cannot."

"Yes. Come, then."

The Vulcan put a hand on his shoulder. Propelled him gently but determinedly through to the bedroom.

"What are you doing?"

He didn't answer until they reached the bed. "Unfortunately, as you know, I can refuse you nothing. If you insist on linking now, you will lie here for the duration of the meld. At least you will be relaxed, and if you should feel faint..." He helped Kirk to climb on the bed, arranged the pillows so that he was half sitting.

"What about you?"

"I have not been ill. Besides, I will be sitting down."

"Taking the weight off your feet?" Kirk reached, tracing a finger down the thin face, eyes and voice very soft. "Dear Spock. You too must have suffered much. Do you think me selfish and demanding to ask for this when you are tired? But Spock...do not you fear further separation? I could not bear it, unless we were linked."

"Hush, be still." Spock took Kirk's hand, held it for a moment, then placed it on his face in the meld position. "Do you think I do not know you, that you ask such foolish things? There is some confusion. I have not understood all that you have spoken of this evening. As you say, explanations can wait until morning. I know you are not selfish, but you are very distressed. If this will alleviate your distress, we must do it now. Relax now, and let me in."

He initiated the mind-link with extra care and gentleness. Passing quickly through the layers of the well-known, well loved mind, he reached the basic level necessary to the difficult directional link, without encountering any trouble. The fact that his partner relaxed completely, freely opening his mind to the Vulcan's touch, helped considerably. There were no barriers to break down, no potentially dangerous pressure was required. Once arrived at the correct level, Spock quickly, efficiently, joined them. For all time, now, he and his bondmate would be linked directionally. Would be able, in almost any circumstance, to find the other if he were lost. Carefully, slowly now so as to avoid psychic shock, he withdrew. He could not resist lingering a while at the level of emotion, unable to resist the delight and welcome his mind encountered there, unable to resist

responding. Then, slowly again, he withdrew, up to the final consciousness, and took his hand from Kirk's face.

Pale but relieved, he sat back. Kirk, pale also, smiled at him. "It was successful?"

"Yes."

Kirk leaned back against his pillows. "All is well, then, whatever happens. Come now and sleep."

"Yes, indeed you must sleep."

Spock bent to pull up the bedcovers. A swift hand shot out, held his wrist. "Where are you going? You must sleep too."

"I am only going to douse the fire. I will be back directly."

He was not long away. When he returned, Kirk lay sleeping, the hand that had held his wrist stretched across the bed. Spock reached to turn off the dim light, found, instead, he had taken the outstretched hand. Holding it lightly in his own, he sat on the side of the bed. Immediately he was aware of a direct gaze.

"I am sorry. You were sleeping."

"No, only dozing. I was waiting for you." His own hand gripped Spock's, half lifting it from the bed. "Such clever hands, to be able to reach my mind. Such a powerful brain, to forge a link that none can break... My brilliant, beloved Vulcan."

Their eyes met and held in a timeless moment of commitment.

"Jim, earlier you asked if I knew how much I mean to you..."

"Did I? I thought I put it differently." The hazel eyes were teasing now.

Spock smiled. "Be quiet. Do not interrupt. I do know, I have known for a long time...you are so open with me, Jim. Do you...have you... Oh, Elandir, I would not intentionally keep anything from you, but my nature...my upbringing... Do I make it plain to you how I feel, in return?"

The teasing tenderness deepened. "I think you are quite fond of me, yes."

The intensity left the dark Vulcan eyes, was replaced by helpless laughter. "Jim. You are hopeless."

"And you are helpless. Please, Commander, control your amusement. Pull yourself together. Whatever would the crew think if they could see you like this?"

Released from tension, they fell about, laughing like schoolboys, until, gasping and wiping his eyes, Kirk reached out a hand. "Come on, Spock. We're supposed to be getting some sleep."

"Well, move over then, and let me get into my bed."

Still smiling, Kirk made way for Spock, pushed a pillow over for him. Spock turned off the light and climbed into bed. He lay quietly for a moment, then spoke into the darkness.

"I love you," he said.

"I know."

Together, they slept.

* * * * *

Spock awoke, immediately aware that he was alone. He smiled to himself. Jim was a light sleeper, and once awake, too restless to lie in bed. Stretching luxuriously, he got up and went over to his shower. As he showered and dressed, he hummed a little, a few bars of an old Vulcan folk-song. It was sheer joy to have Jim back. Whatever had he meant about being away for months? Had he, after

all, been dreaming as he lay in sickbay? McCoy had said not...but... Ah well, after they came off duty tonight they could have a long talk. Doubtless he would explain then.

It came as no surprise to him when he called in at Kirk's quarters, to find them empty. So like Jim to get back on the job as soon as he could. He wondered if perhaps it might be better for him to take it easy for a few days, and decided to stop off at sickbay and ask McCoy on his way to breakfast.

As he rounded the bend leading to sickbay, McCoy came through the swooshing doors, almost colliding with Spock. Putting a hand out to steady the Doctor, Spock treated him to one of his rare smiles. "Careful, Doctor, more speed less haste, as you say on Earth."

McCoy glanced at him sharply, surprised by his evident high spirits. "Hm? First time I heard it put that way... You seem cheerful this morning. We're almost back at that Hellhole, you know. Have you worked out your plan of action yet?"

Spock's insides somersaulted and tied themselves into a knot simultaneously. Premonition warned him, icily, to step very carefully. He found he could not speak, stared blankly at the Doctor.

What a strange mood Spock is in today, thought McCoy sourly. First cheerful, for Heaven's sake, and now looking as if he had turned to stone. Same colour, almost, too. Sort of putty colour. Just in time, he reached quickly, steadying the Vulcan as he swayed.

"Spock, for Pete's sake, what's wrong? Are you ill, too? You seemed all right a moment ago."

With a tremendous effort, Spock pulled himself together. Closing his eyes, he breathed slowly, quietly for a few seconds, then, more sure of himself, opened his eyes, looked into McCoy's face with such lack of expression that the Doctor was warned of some pretty strong emotion going on behind that shuttered face.

Spock opened his mouth, found that although his lips were dry and his tongue clumsy, he could, after all, speak.

"Doctor...have you...have you seen Jim this morning?" For God's sake, man, don't stand there staring at me like that. Answer me. ANSWER ME!

McCoy made no attempt to hide his surprise. "Of course I've seen him. What sort of a doctor do you think I am? Or friend, for that matter. I've been with him all night - took my records in there. Somehow I don't like leaving him alone unless I have to..." He found he was talking to himself. Turning, Spock left him in mid-sentence, and moving heavily and clumsily, went through the sickbay door, making for Kirk's room. Shrugging resignedly, McCoy followed. Silently, Spock crossed to the bed, stood looking down at the sleeping man there for a long time.

At last he turned to McCoy, and now, far from being blank, his eyes blazed with some sort of wild hope. He seized the doctor roughly by the shoulders. "You cannot have been here all night. What about your other patients?"

Worried now, McCoy put his hands over Spock's, moving them from his shoulders, turning them, to clasp them in his own. "Spock, what is this? What's the matter? Come and sit down, and..."

"Never mind the bedside manner, Doctor, answer me please."

"Very well. No, I didn't leave him. It was a very quiet night. I asked not to be called unless necessary, had a lot of paperwork to catch up on."

"You never left him? Not for a minute, even?"

Exasperated now, McCoy turned from Spock, began to walk up and down the small room.

"Why such an inquisition, Spock? Why are you so concerned? Jim's no worse, just the same."

Spock, too, was pacing the room now, and for an insane moment McCoy was overwhelmed by the desire to laugh. Anyone seeing them could be excused for thinking them to be performing some ritual dance. He quickly clamped down the desire, knew that if he were to laugh, the odds were that he wouldn't be able to stop, would end up hysterical...unless, of course, Spock killed him first. He certainly looked capable of it at this moment. Stopping his pacing, he faced the Vulean.

"No, Spock; I can't think why it's so important to you, but I never left him. I was with him here since Lt. Uhura left at 2100 hours last night, right up to...what is it now? 0600 hours."

"Perhaps you slept." Relief washed over the gaunt features. "You must have slept." Spock almost smiled at McCoy in his relief.

This time it was McCoy's turn to look blank. Blank with the professional emptiness of a medical man trying hard not to lose his temper.

"Mr. Spock, I surely do not need to remind you that I was on duty. I am as much a military man as you are. Do you sleep on duty?"

Spock was never one to shield himself from truth. Knew truth when he saw it. McCoy was a military man, a good one. A good Doctor... So it had been a dream, then. A dream? No...impossible. But yes, it must have been. No other explanation. Accept it, you fool. Worse than fool.

"Forgive me." Wearily, he passed a hand over his face, reminiscent once more in his gesture of the Captain. "I must get up to the bridge." Swiftly, he left the room. Very troubled, McCoy watched him go.

Resolutely, Spock set the dream behind him, refused to let himself dwell on it. Before going on duty, he wandered up to a small observation lounge near the top of the ship, where he knew he could be alone. He sat, staring, literally, into space. The stars rushed past the enlarged porthole, their light illuminating the spirals of cosmic dust into patterns which normally he would have found fascinating. He saw neither the stars nor the patterns. Deep in some wordless place in his mind, he knew that to stay sane, to steer and organise this complex ship, to carry out his manoeuvre at the approaching Hazard, he must dismiss all thoughts of what had seemed to happen last night. First, though, he must sort the tangle of confusion in his mind.

Surely no dream could be so vivid, that on waking he had not realised it for what it was? Cold reason informed him that there were such dreams. Rare, yes, but possible, nevertheless. Added to which was the irrefutable evidence of Dr. McCoy, the evidence of the figure on the bed. Still wired, monitored as he had been for three days. Peaceful and...unmoving. Most damning of all was the absence of any evidence of their linking.

Well, that was that. The situation was no worse than it had been last night. His plan was prepared for taking Jim back through the Hazard. What he must not do, dared not do, was allow his mind to stray on the hopeless, useless thought that only minutes earlier he had been so foolish as to believe a dream to be reality.

Getting to his feet, he walked steadily, firmly, to the door, Vulcan control in perfect working order. As he reached it, his feet stopped suddenly. He stood immobile. Unheralded, unwelcome, memories of the dream's joy and tenderness overwhelmed him. Leaning hands and head on the bulkhead, he shook uncontrollably. Gradually the intensity of the images dimmed, body and feet obeyed him again. Once more he made for the bridge.

It was less than an Earth day's journey to the Hazard. His plan formulated, his passage checked, re-checked, all that remained for the First Officer to do was find a medical volunteer, inform the crew of his intentions, and hand the Enterprise, temporarily he trusted, to Mr. Scott.

In order to re-enter at the point from which originally they had exited, it

was necessary first to travel the length of the Hazard, keeping a safe distance from its magnetic clouds. Spock knew the task of informing the rest of the crew could not be put off any longer. His reluctance to do so surprised him. It was not just that he feared their reaction, their doubts, it was deeper and more basic than that. What troubled him most was that he could not put a name to it. Impatient with himself, he went to sit in the Captain's command chair, requested Lt. Uhura to put him on intra-ship audio. He gathered the attention of the bridge crew with a look.

"I have something to tell you, to tell the whole crew. Lieutenant?"

"Go right ahead, sir."

Stiffening slightly, Spock sat straight in the command chair. "All hands, this is Commander Spock. You are aware of the sudden and unusual affliction which struck Captain Kirk four days ago, shortly after travelling through space section X134/B. The cause of the Captain's illness has remained a mystery, both to the medical department and the scientists. After much deliberation, I have decided that the best hope for reversing the Captain's condition is to take him..."

A summons; faint, but definite.

Not possible; but there, unmistakable...stronger now...stronger, more certain with each passing second.

How? The link? No...a dream...

No, this is no dream...no imagining.

The link, pulling, summoning, demanding.

Helplessly, his eyes slid from the bridge crew, patiently, puzzledly waiting. Rested on the navigation charts. Where from? Surely from the Hazard? No. They had passed that now. Where, then, where else, if not there?

The crew stirred, troubled. Watched concernedly. All over the Enterprise men and women looked at each other, waiting, wondering.

The immobile figure in the command chair took a deep breath, focused again on his companions. The big ship held its breath...

"To take him to...Vulcan. Spock out."

Scott's voice, loud and querulous, brought them all back to normality; its strong Scottish accent impatiently swept away the sense of unreality which permeated the bridge.

"Vulcan? Vulcan! Mr. Spock, have ye gone quite mad, or have I? Ye told us, or as good as told us, we were making for Vulcan two days ago. Ye said ye'd explain why. Surely that's not all ye've got to give us. Why are we going to Vulcan? What's so special there that will aid the Captain? Ye ken fine ye owe us an explanation, sir - ye promised us one."

This was a strong speech for a subordinate, even one as canny and experienced as Scott. The rest of the crew waited, apprehensively, for Spock's reaction. The Captain had always been the catalyst on this bridge. They all missed his easy discipline, and lightness of touch. For four days now they had had to live with their fears for his safety and also the incipient volcano who was their First Officer. Although exercising the strictest control over himself, they knew him well enough by now to sense his brooding worry, to feel the tension building for a storm.

Their fears were unfounded. Spock's face, as he turned to the Chief Engineer, was quietly serene. The earlier tense control had disappeared. He was almost their own Spock again.

"Rest easy, Mr. Scott." Calmly, his eye waved aside the apology in Scott's. "You are right. I do owe you all an explanation, but it will have to wait." Just as the persistent buzzing at his elbow would have to wait. He knew it was the doctor, knew exactly what he would say. "At the moment, I am having

difficulty in explaining it to myself. Please, I ask you again to trust me. At least now I am sure that we are taking the correct action... Mr. Scott, will you take the con."

Giving attention to the frantic buzzing, he flipped a switch. "Doctor, please come to my quarters. I must confer with you."

Despite his extreme annoyance and amazement, McCoy could not quite suppress his interest in Spock's quarters. It was very rare indeed for the reserved Vulcan to invite anyone to them. He hadn't missed much, he concluded. Not his style at all; too bare, too primitive...but...elegant after their fashion. You had to hand it to the ornery devil - he had natural elegance, both of person and of taste. He became aware of the Vulcan's quizzical, almost amused scrutiny.

"Do you approve, Doctor? Not your choice, I feel."

"No, since you ask...but then you didn't get me here to show me your decor. You look mighty pleased with yourself, Spock. Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain a few things to me. I'd like to feel as pleased as you look. At the moment I feel like someone who's been well and truly led up the garden path... Oh, no, you don't. That innocent expression won't wash. You know more of our Earth's colloquialisms than I do. You bludgeoned me into going along with your hare-brained scheme for taking Jim back through the Hazard, and now...now I find that after all, you had no such intention. You had better have a good reason for what you just said up there on the bridge, Spock. Because, my Vulcan friend, if you haven't, I am going right away to order Mr. Scott, on medical grounds, to turn this ship right round and go to the hospital base."

While McCoy was speaking, Spock went over to the wall and took down his lyre. Sitting in his low chair, he began to tune it softly, waiting until the doctor was finished. Then, lifting his head, he looked straight at him, his face very open.

"Sit down, Leonard. I understand how you feel. My behaviour must seem somewhat illogical... No." He lifted a hand from the lyre to stop McCoy. "Please... bear with me." Softly, slowly, still tuning the lyre, he began to tell the doctor of Jim's appearance in that room, the day before. Told him about their directional link, how, after talking with McCoy in sickbay, he thought it must all have been a dream. Until - and here he paused, played a few notes of haunting melody - until ...on the bridge, after they had passed the Hazard, were about to turn for his re-entry into it...he had felt the link. Pulling, compellingly, faint at first then ever stronger, pulling from the opposite direction to the Hazard. Coming from Vulcan. Realised that the weird anomaly that was the Hazard had prevented its working while it had been between them and Vulcan.

The low voice, the melodic notes of the plucked strings, gave McCoy the oddest feeling of listening to some sort of epic poem. Spock was like one of the minstrels of old. He even had the turned-in look of a minstrel communing with himself. He felt suddenly awed, as if he were taking part in some living legend. These two... they were surely the very stuff of legend, of tales passed down from generation to generation. Tales told by the fireside, when the lamps were low, accompanied by stirring, shining music. He was silent for some time after Spock had finished, loath to break the spell Spock had woven.

"So that explains your strange behaviour in sickbay." He spoke at last.

"You believe me, then?"

"Oh yes, I believe you. I can't understand it - I was with him all night - but I believe you. I'm beginning to think that even death itself will not be able to separate you two. But Spock...where is he? Oh, I don't mean his body, that's just a living shell. What you've told me explains at least the lack of response from his body, his brain...I mean him - his spirit, whatever you call it. Where is he, and how did he get there, and how in the Galaxy are you going to get him back?"

Spock rose, replaced the lyre on the wall. "I believe I have answered one of your questions already, Leonard. He is on Vulcan. How he got there? Well, for that we must look into the Hazard. Somehow that mass of crossed, shifting time-lines pulled him from us to Vulcan. Not the Vulcan of our time. Otherwise he would have returned to us. No, he is somewhere in Vulcan's past...or future. And Leonard, I think the Hazard must act as a natural transporter, drawing people, ships, to all sorts of places and times. That would explain earlier disappearances. In Jim's case, fortunately for us, and in the case, possibly, of Chekov's grandfather, it made an error, duplicated his body though not his mind or spirit. We were left with the shell, as you say."

"Spock. If it had duplicated his mind as well..."

"Yes. He would still be here, quite normally, and his double would be somewhere on Vulcan."

"So there could be doubles of us all wandering about in different times?"

Spock shuddered slightly. "Please, Doctor, one of some of us is quite sufficient. Fortunately, what you said is theoretical. What occurred with Jim is fact. You ask how I will bring him back?" A shadow crossed the thin face. "I do not know, yet. I only know that the nearer we come to Vulcan, the stronger I feel the link. Somehow I feel that once we reach there we will find a solution. Will you help me? If you stand with me on this, the crew will breathe more easily. They trust me, I know, but in some ways I am still alien to them. My ways and ideas strange. If they see us united in this, not fighting as they too often see us, the fact that I am unable as yet to give them an explanation will trouble them less."

"You're getting very perceptive, Spock. More of Jim's influence?"

"I believe I always was perceptive, Doctor. Perhaps Jim has helped me to reveal myself more. You have not answered me."

McCoy got to his feet. Briefly patted the tall Vulcan's arm. "Yes, of course I'll help you...on one condition. Get a good meal inside you, and then rest. Don't argue with me - " as the other's eyebrow rose dangerously, " - Lord knows when you last ate or slept properly. Come on - I'm going to eat now. Come with me."

"Very well, Leonard. Incidentally, I was not going to argue with you. Merely going to point out that you have laid down two conditions, not one."

As he got to grips with his steak, McCoy watched Spock, hungry for the first time in four days, busily demolish a large plate of what looked like purple seaweed. He waited until the Vulcan had quite finished, then laid down his own knife and fork.



"Something's puzzling me, Spock. How did Jim get back here last night? And why didn't he stay once he'd come?"

"I have given that much thought also. Possibly some side-effect of the condition occasioned by the Hazard. We were very close to it at the time, if you recall. That and..." The voice dropped, slowed, the Vulcan looked at McCoy almost shyly. "He...needed me. He was very distressed. It was his idea to link...thank God that we did...but I do not think it was that that brought him back. Someone had been ill-using him. There were bruises on his face, and I think he had been ill, wherever he has been. He seemed greatly in need of..." Spock broke off, glancing helplessly, defiantly, at his friend.

"Don't look at me like that, Spock. I'm your friend, remember? If Jim was desperately in need of comfort, support, then of course he would try to find you to give them to him. How did he find you, get here? That's what I'm asking. Perhaps, as you say, a combination of some side-effect and his desperate need brought you together. I said before, I doubt if even death will keep you two apart. I wonder why he went back?"

Spock gave him a grateful look. "I think you may be right. I had come to a similar conclusion. I don't know why he went back. Perhaps he had to. I am sure he had no choice in the matter..."

"No," replied the doctor miserably. "He would hardly want to return to someone who had been beating him." Seeing the pain and rage in the Vulcan's face, he regretted his last remark. Hesitantly he put a hand out, lightly touched Spock's wrist. "Don't worry, Spock. Jim will give as good as he gets... Better!"

Spock rose from the table. McCoy could not remember seeing him look so hard, so determined. "Under normal circumstances, he would, Doctor. Unfortunately, his present circumstance is probably far from normal. We must get to Vulcan without delay."

* * * * *

The small room was full of light. Bright, dazzling sunlight, too bright for comfort, thought T'Kai. Wringing out a cloth in cold, scented water, she replaced it on her patient's forehead before rising and crossing to the window to draw the blind lower, shutting out as much of the red brilliance as possible.

When she turned back, she saw her husband standing quietly by the bed, looking down at their patient, his face thoughtful and serene. Softly, she went to stand by his side, took one of his hands in hers. As he turned to her, she looked up at him but said nothing, waiting for him to speak. Before he did so, a slow, almost shy smile lit up his face, as he looked down at her.

"You were right. He looks nearly recovered now."

Twining her fingers in his, she returned his smile lovingly. Still moved beyond words by its presence. Her mind raced back over the past week, returning to the scene she had found in this room after being told by Saleek that her husband's slave was sick and that Lord Spock would not leave his side.

Hurrying to the small room attached to her husband's bedchamber, she had found him white and distraught, questioning their old family physician Poalin. The doctor was looking grave, pulling at his beard.

"He is very ill, Lord Spock," he was saying. "Some fever of the blood, I fear. We must apply the leeches, though I doubt if it will save him. He looks close to death." Bowing to T'Kai, he picked up his bag and prepared to leave. "I will send my assistant at once with the leeches, and will call again tomorrow."

T'Kai pushed impatiently past him. She had never trusted his judgement, and he knew and resented the fact. Since time out of mind he had served Spock's family, and Spock, as is the way with men, would no more have thought of changing to another doctor than he would have cut off his hand. T'Kai, with more than her share of woman's common sense had often thought he looked for the most obscure

diagnoses possible, ignoring the obvious as if it were too commonplace for him. She had never trusted him with her son's ailments, preferring to treat them herself. Her own father had been a dedicated and brilliant physician, and although as a woman she was barred from the profession, privately she had studied all she could. She felt herself to be as able as any doctor of her acquaintance, and more able than most.

Bending over Kirk, she put a cool hand on his burning forehead. He was semi-conscious and very restless. Without taking her eyes off him, she spoke over her shoulder.

"This is no fever of the blood. Rather a fever from the sun. Uncommon in these parts but quite prevalent in the Northern lands where the people are not so used to the fierce heat as we are. If they travel to our towns, sometimes they are so affected. Bring me water."

When none came she turned impatiently. The doctor had left, and her husband, standing beside her, was looking down at Kirk, his face drawn with fear and guilt. She knew that look well. Had lived with it for a long time. When, after repeating her request, she was still ignored, something snapped in her mind. This time she would not live with that look, stand by, hoping and praying that he would return to normal given time. She stood up from the bed, put her hands on Spock's arms and shook him with all her strength. "What is the matter with you that you stand there like a fool? Did you hear me? Bring me water - quickly!"

Startled out of his semi-trance, Spock stared at her. Made two false starts before he could speak. "Water?...but..."

"Bring it. Quickly. I must try to quieten him. He will exhaust himself tossing like this."

Frowning, she removed the bedcovers from Kirk, carefully took off his tunic leaving him naked save for the brief shorts. With brisk, capable hands she tore the tunic into three pieces.

'Spock', after staring at her like one stunned, went to the pitcher on the wash-stand, returning with it and the cup. Giving him a brief, sharp look, she took them from him, poured some into the cup, gave the pitcher and a piece of cloth to 'Spock'.

"Wet that, and wipe him down with it. Quickly!" as he hesitated. Gently, putting her arm under the sick man's shoulders, she raised the cup to his lips. He resisted at first, but after she managed to pour a few drops down his throat, he turned eagerly to it, drinking the whole cupful.

'Spock', she was relieved to see, was obeying her at last. Relaxing a little she took another piece of the cloth and joined him in gently sponging the sick man's body. Her husband regarded her warily across the bed.

"Poalin is sending leeches to draw some blood, yet you are adding fluid to his body..."

"Don't stop. And that cloth is not wet enough. Here, have this one... Poalin is an incompetent fool. You know how I feel about him. Do you forget that I am a doctor's daughter? Who do you think has really been looking after your family's health all these years? Not Poalin, I assure you."

"You? But Poalin was always consulted." .'

"By you, yes. Hold him, while I give him another drink...gently...he bruises easily. But I will tell you, Spock, I have always disregarded his advice. The man is a pompous incompetent. I used my own knowledge and none of you ever suffered through my ministrations."

"T'Kai...I never knew you felt so strongly about Poalin."

"You would have, if you had listened to me more. That's enough - we don't want to choke him... There is much that you don't know, My Lord, nor have ever bothered to find out. Wrapped up as you have been for years in futile, groundless

remorse...and self-pity."

"Self-pity?"

Well, she had gone so far. Might as well get it off her chest at last. "Self-pity, yes. You have wallowed in it for years. Wasted your time and energy in regret for your worthless 'friend'. Shunned the love and company of those who would give anything for a little of those commodities from you... This man needs medicine as well as cooling. Stay with him, and keep sponging him down. Get him to drink more, if you can. I have some of my cooling physic in my room. I will go and get it."

Crossing to the door, she paused, flung the next remark over her shoulder. "If Poalin's assistant arrives with the leeches, you may send him packing. I will not have a leech brought anywhere near my patient... Tell him also, his master's services will not be required tomorrow. We can manage without him."

Baffled and confused by the sudden change in his gentle, biddable wife, 'Spock' stared after her as she briskly left the room. Shaking his head a little, he bent to obey her order to try to cool the fevered man on the bed. Wringing out a cloth, he gently wiped Kirk's face, wincing as the cloth touched the bruises, his own face full of remorse and regret.

T'Kai was not long in returning, bringing a small flagon and a fresh pitcher of water. Pouring some of the aromatic-smelling liquid into a cup, she bade 'Spock' hold Kirk's head while she gave it to him. "It is not pleasant. Half-conscious as he is, he may resist it."

The patient, however, drank it quietly, his eyes closed, more restful now. As 'Spock' laid his head back onto the pillow, he gave a little sigh and relaxed into sleep.

Husband and wife stood regarding him in silence. T'Kai was the first to break that silence. "How did he come by those bruises?"

"I...struck him... I also sent him to the mangol fields for the day...as a punishment...on a day of such unbearable heat as this has been..." His eyes, anguished and apprehensive, met hers, awaiting the judgement of this new, sharp-tongued T'Kai.

"You are sorry now, I can see that... No use torturing yourself again. It will not help."

"But T'Kai...he did not deserve punishment, he was trying to help us. He angered me on purpose...I see that now...to draw my anger away from you."

"From me?... Oh, I understand." She met his gaze steadily. "He...found me weeping, and I told him our sad history, Spock. There is something about him, some quality of gentleness, of compassion, that drew the tale from me... Who is he, Spock? Certainly he is no slave... He said he would go to you, try to help. I warned him to be careful - not to anger you. I should have known. He is not the sort to take much thought for his own safety."

"No...and once again history repeats itself. If he dies...I will once more have killed my friend...this time my true friend." He sank to his knees by the bed, burying his head in his hands. Swiftly T'Kai went to him, knelt by his side, pulled the hands from his face to replace them with her own.

"Spock...beloved...he will not die. I promise you. Believe me, my dear, my dearest, I am as knowledgeable as any doctor. He is young and strong. Truly, he will recover."

Once again their eyes held. His, longing to believe, to hope; hers re-assuring, comforting...loving. At last he gave a deep sigh, turned his face within her hands to kiss them. "He wanted to help us."

"And surely he has done so."

"Yes, at cost to himself... Oh, T'Kai, can you forgive these wasted years?"

These years of my neglect...my selfishness? What a fool I've been..."

T'Kai put a hand over his lips. "Hush, my dear. No more recriminations. No more such words."

His eyes smiled down into hers. "No more words at all," he whispered, and bent to kiss her. "T'Kai. T'Kai, I will try to make these lost years up to you."

Winding her arms around his neck, she held her cheek against his. "You have done so already."

She was not a doctor's daughter for nothing. Kirk responded to her treatment with the response she had expected from his strength and youth. Neither she nor 'Spock' would entertain anyone but themselves looking after him.

They tended him tirelessly, devotedly, and little by little his fever dropped and he returned to consciousness. For three days he slept most of the time; deep, healing sleep. When he awoke at last to full consciousness it was to a state of complete peace and hope. Throughout his illness he had been dimly aware of gentle hands and low voices; of care and comfort. In his weak state he had thought that caring and comfort to come from Spock. Indeed, many times, half-waking, had looked into the warm brown eyes, felt the gentle hands of his bondmate - as he had thought - and, comforted, slept again.

When, on the fourth day, he returned to himself, he did so with his customary clearheadedness. As soon as he awoke he knew exactly where he was. Realised it had not as he imagined been Spock caring for him, nor was he as he had thought in his delirium on the Enterprise, but on Vulcan nine hundred years ago. Just as he had been when he had lain down on this bed, sick and exhausted after his day in the mangol fields.

Why, then, this feeling of peace and optimism? Why did he not feel the anguish and despair he had felt at that time? In some deep level of his being the answer stirred, strengthening with every passing minute. Unlike Spock, he had not had to suffer the period when the Hazard had prevented their link from working. By the time he had regained consciousness the Enterprise had passed the Hazard. Its distorting effects were no longer present. Never for one moment did he doubt his return to the ship, think, as Spock had reluctantly been forced to think, their joyful reunion to have been only a dream. He might have felt depressed by the fact of his returning again to Vulcan, but the link prevented that. In some strange way, he felt now that his mysterious sojourn on Vulcan had been necessary. That necessity was almost over now. Somehow, he was certain he would soon return to his ship, his rightful place in life, permanently. Meanwhile, the wonderful interlude with Spock had refreshed, revitalised his soul.

He lay quietly for a while, eyes closed, re-living wonderingly the scene he and Spock had shared on the Enterprise. It would live for ever in his memory. Even as he lay there the pull of the link grew stronger, more urgent. He smiled to himself. Spock was very near now. Almost, he felt, if he stretched out his hand...

Weak but determined, he struggled to sit up. He had lain here long enough, the time was coming for action.

A hand appeared on his shoulder, pushed him gently but firmly down again. "Lie down. What do you think you are doing?"

"Lady T'Kai." He smiled up at her. "It is you that has been looking after me." His eyes moved to the man at her side. "And you too...My Lord."

"Spock will do, my friend. You have called that name many times while you were sick, though I know it was not to me that you called... Kirk...I am deeply sorry for what I did. I know now why you angered me. You were trying to help us..."

Kirk pulled a wry face, interrupting him. "Trying to help, I made things worse."

T'Kai laughed, took her husband's hand. "Indeed you did not. See how we are. We are like two lovebirds." Her eyes slanted, unashamed, at 'Spock'. "Is that not so, husband?"

"I see you are quite shameless. What will our guest think of you?" But the eyes looking down were full of love and wonder.

"Guest?" Kirk laughed softly. "When I was last in my mind, I was your slave, My Lord."

'Spock' regarded him calmly. "T'Kai knows your story, my friend. I told her everything you told me... Unlike me, she had no difficulty believing it."

She arched her eyebrows at Kirk. "I have always had much more sense than he has. But we must not tire you. You must eat now you are back with us. I will bring you some of my special broth."

Kirk regarded her with respectful amusement. "You are very good to me. It is true, I do feel hungry."

"You will do. My excellent medicine has restored you to health. Now we must build up that health. You have lost much weight. Spock, dear, while I am away, I trust you not to allow him to exert himself." Smiling at them both in turn, she left them alone together.

'Spock' sat down on the edge of the bed and looked at Kirk. "I called you 'my friend' a moment ago, but I do not think I have the right so to call you. I have not acted towards you as to a friend." Lightly, gently, he touched his fingers to the fading bruises on the other's face. "When you were ill, you looked at me sometimes with such trust. I know it was to your own Spock that you were looking... It is in my heart to wish that the trust had been for me."

Kirk took the hand and held it tightly. "You are my Spock. He is you. He is descended directly from you. He is the essence of all that is good, all that is noble in our Universe. You are very like him. More like than I would have believed when first I met you... I am proud to call you friend, proud that you think of me as such."

T'Kai, returning with the nourishing broth, saw the two engrossed, and stayed only to settle Kirk comfortably to eat. Left them to sort out the World and themselves.

In fact, nothing was said for quite a while. 'Spock' held the bowl for Kirk while he ate, broke the easy silence at last.

"I have given much thought these past few days to what you said, how you feel about slavery. You were correct when you said I did not approve of it. Correct also in saying I have influence with the Council... I have wasted much of my life, many valuable years, but will try to make amends. I do not know how successful I will be, but I promise you I will try. I give you my word to do my very best to rid Vulcan of slavery. That is my pledge to you.....before you leave."

Carefully, Kirk put the spoon into the empty bowl. "You know then that I am going?" he asked quietly.

"Yes."

"How do you know? Are you a telepath?"

"I am not acquainted with that word. I know only that I have a strong feeling that the time is fast approaching when you will leave us."

Kirk leaned back, half sitting, half lying on the pillows. When he spoke, it was so softly the Vulcan had to lean close to hear.

"You do not know the word. No, in your time, Vulcans had not developed that power. Yet you feel what I feel... You...and me. Was there ever a time, I wonder, will there ever in the future be a time when you and I do not call to each other?"

"Many times I have accused you of speaking in riddles. I do not mind them

now, I think I even understand them... What is your name? Oh - " as Kirk lifted his head sharply, " - not Kkirk...you see, I cannot even say that properly. Your special name. What do your friends call you? What does he call you?"

"Jim. My name is James Kirk, Jim for short."

"Jim." 'Spock' reached out a hand, clasped Kirk's. "Jim...do not go. Stay here with us."

Kirk returned the firm pressure. "You know I must go."

"No..... Yes."

Hazel eyes locked with brown, spanning the centuries.

Unseen, T'Kai stood in the doorway, watching. She could see Kirk's expression, but she could not see 'Spock's' face clearly. For a second a shadow crossed her own face. Had she regained her husband after so long only to lose him again? Her slight movement caught 'Spock's' eye. He released Kirk's hand, shook himself a little, then rose, crossed the room to lead her into it. Smiled into her trusting eyes. She returned his smile, all traces of shadow gone.

Kirk's convalescence was rapid and uncomplicated. He spent much of it in the gardens, T'Kai making sure he kept in the shade. It was a time for reflection, for gathering his thoughts; as a result of all this thinking he came to a startling conclusion.

Most of his time was shared by one, or all, of the family. A real family now. In its mood of new-found happiness, the household expanded and basked in warmth and cheerfulness. Although impatient to return home, he knew he would not now leave this family without a pang. If his conclusion was correct, though, there was nothing to stay here for now. His work was finished. As patiently as was possible for one of such mercurial temperament, he awaited Spock's coming. Knew it would not be long to wait.

Autumn and harvest were drawing into winter. What passed for winter on Vulcan was something like a pleasant heatwave on Earth. On one slightly milder day than usual, 'Spock' and Kirk, walking in the garden discussing the timeless problems of the Universe, rounded a hedge to descend the few steps to the sunken garden. No-one was there this day; T'Kai and Serek had gone to visit friends. Slowly, still talking, they walked to the old red marble bench by the fountain and sat down.

The point they had been discussing settled to their mutual satisfaction, they rested a while in companionable silence. Suddenly, 'Spock' turned abruptly to Kirk.

"Do you believe in the Gods, or Fate...or whatever you call it in your time?"

Kirk's eyes were thoughtful. "I do not know. Oh, when I was very young, I did not, I believed only in my own powers...now...well...I am not so sure. Why do you ask?"

"I cannot explain your coming here to Vulcan as you did, when you did, unless it was ordered by something, someone. You have changed our lives so. Even may have changed the history of our people, if I can emancipate the slaves."

His companion's smile was slow and warm. "You are right, in part at least, of what you say. Someone did indeed order me here...you did."

"I did?"

"Yes. You summoned me. No. listen. It is not another of my riddles. I have had much time to think, just lately, and have come to that conclusion. Do you remember, some time ago, you asked me was I fond of Spock - my Spock?"

"You answered that he was dearer to you than anyone in the Universe. Yes, I remember."

"Do you also remember our discussion on alternate universes? Countless

other worlds living out their lives alongside our own."

"I did not believe you."

"No. It is hard to believe. I have had some experience of them, however, and in each one I have encountered, the bond between myself and Spock has been extraordinary. In every world we are drawn, each to the other, by some power so strong we cannot deny it...even if we would. I think that as we passed through the Hazard, through the shifting time-lines, we crossed this one, your time-line, My Lord Spock...Spock, my friend. As we did so, your unhappiness called to me through the bond which exists between us."

"But I am not your Spock."

"I told you - you are. All of him is my Spock. In any world, any time, if any Spock is in need and I am near, I must go to him."

"So you came to me. To help me."

"I did not come knowingly. Our bond drew me. Nor did I come willingly... but I am glad, now, that I came. I have helped you. Oh, by no skill of my own. I can take no credit for what has happened. But yes, my coming helped you. My illness drew you and Lady T'Kai together again...and also, your trust in me has helped you to overcome the past. You will trust others now."

'Spock' looked at him silently for a moment, his eyes suspiciously bright. "You speak as though all this came about easily, yet it was at great cost to yourself... Jim, I have never asked you properly to forgive my actions that day I sent you to the mangol fields. Words cannot express my sorrow when I think of that day. Please...will you forgive me?"

"Don't." Kirk lightly touched the Vulcan's arm. "Please don't distress yourself. It was all to the good. Everything has worked out for the best. Of course I forgive you... Anyway - " a slow grin spread over his face, " - considering what you had to put up with from your new slave, you have been a very lenient master."

'Spock' put urgent hands on Kirk's shoulders, was about to reply when a look of amazement crossed his face. His hands slid down the Human's arms, clasped the hands instead. Brown eyes looked deep into Kirk's. Into...and through him.

Startled, mind alerted, Kirk watched the Vulcan's inward-looking eyes. Just for a moment, he thought he heard his own Spock's voice, but it was gone so quickly he could not be sure. Holding tightly to the Vulcan's hands, he waited quietly, sensing the time was very near.

* * * * *

Commander Spock spent the time left to him before arriving at Vulcan in hurriedly adapting a portable mini-transporter to his needs. The small device had only a very short range, but should prove ideal for his purpose. Created originally to enable the swift removal of personnel from one room to another, or from the inside of a building to the outside, it was used mainly when persons were help prisoner. Its range being limited, Spock knew that he would have to come within very short reach of Kirk's physical presence on Vulcan for it to be effective. He trusted to the link to bring this about.

The mini-transporter, living up to its name, was small enough to fit onto his belt. Before he could use it, Spock first had to adapt it for re-absorption and also to set it for open scan, not knowing which period of Vulcan's time had claimed his friend.

When he had altered the small contraption to his satisfaction, he programmed it to Kirk's co-ordinates and prepared to put his plan into action.

Calling a meeting of senior officers, he outlined his intentions to them. Without going into details, he explained his, and the Doctor's, hope that the Captain's recovery would be effected whilst on the planet's surface, and asked for their support. As he had told the doctor, seeing the two of them, so often opposed, now in united harmony, impressed the crew. Still puzzled, they nevertheless

accepted Spock's limited explanation, hoped he and the Doctor knew what they were about, consoled themselves with the thought that they usually did.

The beam-down was uneventful. Spock had decided to take the Captain to his father's house and proceed from there. After McCoy had given medical clearance, the Vulcan lifted Kirk from the bed he had occupied for five days, and carried him to the transporter room in his arms.

He had discovered earlier that Sarek and Amanda, his parents, were absent from Vulcan at this time. They were at present on Thetia Minor, attending the first inter-Thetian Festival of music and dance. Whilst absent, their household staff was given the opportunity of a short holiday themselves. The house was completely empty.

The three beamed into the cool vestibule of Sarek's town house. Shaking himself irritably to rid his body of the transporter's disorientating effects, McCoy turned to his companion.

"What now? Will you take him to his room?"

"No." Spock seemed puzzled. "I brought him here merely as a preliminary, thought to proceed from here to wherever the link is coming from...but, Doctor - I feel the pull so strongly, I must deduce we are very near its source already."

McCoy mopped his brow, beginning to succumb to the overpowering heat even in the shade of Sarek's marble hall. "Why not take him to his room, then, like I suggested?"

"Because his room is that way." Spock inclined his head to the left. "And I feel strongly drawn in the opposite direction."

"Oh. Good enough reason. Well, what are we waiting for, then? Lead on, Macduff."

The tall Vulcan turned, walked down the corridor. One eyebrow was slightly raised at McCoy's flippancy. In truth, he knew that flippancy was the doctor's defence against the pain and frustration of their situation. After a few paces, they came to another vestibule, smaller than the first, where three doors converged. Unhesitatingly, Spock chose one of the doors, began to push it open with his shoulder, turned with it half opened to the doctor, and now he was hesitant.

"Okay, Spock. No need to look like that. I'll say it for you. I'm excess baggage. Don't worry, I'll make myself scarce."

"No. Wait, Leonard. Stay near to us. We may need you. Besides, Jim will want to see you, as soon as he...if I manage... Forgive me, my friend, I do not wish to offend you."

"All right, Spock, I'm not offended. I know your need for privacy. I'll be here if you need me." He brushed the wayward lock of hair from Kirk's unresponsive forehead. "Only take care. Oh, go on in. Get a move on. I expect to see you both walk out of that door in five minutes."

Spock pushed through the door and descended the stairs to the sunken room. Built that way, as he had learned as a child, to follow the natural formation of the land. At the foot of the stairs, on a rug of pure Aldebaran yak hair and flanked with massed flowerpots full of bright blooms, stood a long carved couch. To one side of it, fed by a fountain, was a small natural pool. Gently, the Vulcan lowered the sleeping Human onto the couch, arranged him comfortably on the cushions. Yes, he had been correct. This was the source of the link. Its magnetic pull was now coming to him directly from the unconscious Captain.

For a moment he straightened, stood back at a loss. Half of him dared to hope that his friend would return to his body as simply as he had left it. When nothing happened, he gave himself a small shake. No, it would not be as easy as that.

Quietly he knelt by the couch and set the mini-transporter clipped to his

belt. Slowly, carefully, placing his hands on the peaceful face, he sought for Kirk's mind.

Contact was established so quickly, he was startled, stiffening slightly.
Jim - and...another?

The other mind met his with impact and strong purpose. There was threat here, but to whom? To himself? To Jim? Instinctively he closed down the link between him and his bondmate. If the threat were to Jim, he must be shielded from it. Immediately the strength of the other mind increased its pressure on his. He recognised it as the mind of a powerful, though undeveloped, telepath. Knew by the fact that the mind was able to reach his that its owner must be in physical contact with Kirk. He must be very careful. The power of this unknown mind could cause Jim untold psychic damage whilst in that contact.

/Who are you?/

/I am Lord Spock...your ancestor./

/My ancestor?/

/Yes. From nine hundred years ago, according to your friend./

/Jim...Captain Kirk has been with you, then?/

/Yes. He is here with me. It appears I summoned him. I needed his help./

/Has he helped you?/

/Indeed yes./

/I have come to take him home... It would seem that you know who I am./

/Oh, yes. I have been expecting you...child of our family's future./

/My Captain...are you still in need of his help?/

/Not as such. He has solved our problem./

/Then you must let him go. His time with you is finished./

/I...cannot let him go. You must understand...I have come to love him./

/I understand, yes. But if you truly love him, you will let him go. He is not of your time. He must return to his own life./

/He will be happy here./

/No. He is a Starship Captain. His place is amongst the stars./

/And with you?/

/And with me./

/Are you worthy of him?/

/I...try to be./

/He thinks you are. He says you are the best the Galaxy has ever produced./

/He loves me./

/...What are you like, my son of the future?/

/How can I answer that?/

/No need. He has told me. If he speaks truly...you are worthy of him./

/You will let him return, then?/

/If I say no, what then?/

/I will fight you, my mind to your mind, until you release him./

/Would you fight to the death?/

/Yes./

/You would kill your own kinsman? Or forfeit your own life?/

/For his future...yes, My Lord./

/You are worthy of him... If he is to be happy, he must return to you...
Spock?/

/My Lord?/

/I did not wish to distress you...only...it is hard to let him go, now that I have come to know him./

/I understand. I will take care of him, My Lord./

/Yes. Keep faith with me, son of my line...tell him...I will keep faith with him, here in the past. He will know what I mean. Live long and prosper, Spock./

/Live long, and prosper...Spock./

For a fraction of a second, the eyes Kirk looked into were nine hundred years in the past. Then, although the expression was the same, the eyes belonged to his own time, his own Spock.

"Spock, dear Spock. I knew you would come for me."

"You called to me, Jim... Indeed, you have called to me since the moment we met. Elandir. Brother of my heart."

Kirk glanced round the well-known room then back, joyfully, to Spock. "I was right about this room... Oh, I'm sorry, you don't know where I've been, Spock. I'll explain it..."

"I do know, Jim. I have had some...conversation with my ancestor."

"Just now?"

"Yes."

"Ah, now I see what... But all that can wait. Oh, it is so good to be back. This time I intend to stay."

"Yes. This time you are back in your body."

"What do you mean?"

"I too will explain later." The brown eyes were suddenly bleak. "Jim... You did wish to return to your own time?"

The hands he had been holding so tightly turned within his, clasped in return. "What do you think?"

Meeting the hazel eyes, reading their expression, Spock's own cleared with relief. "Yes, of course," he replied softly. "But my ancestor, Jim. I...feel regret for him. He will miss you."

"For a little while, but he has a loving wife and son, Spock...whom he loves deeply also. And he has much to do. He gave me a pledge..."

"Yes. He told me to tell you he would keep faith with you... What did he mean?"

"He promised... But no. Later. Later, Spock, I will explain everything to you. Right now, I too have much to do. My ship, my command... Nine months is a long time to be away. Let's go back home."

"Nine months? T'hy'la, it has been five days."

Kirk, who had got up from the couch, stopped in the middle of a long, lazy stretch. Before he could speak, the door burst open, admitting a worried and restless McCoy. He began to bound down the steps. Halted for a second at the best sight he'd seen for some days, leaped the last three steps in one and hugged his friend delightedly.

"Jim. I thought I heard voices. Well I'll be blown. You were right, Spock, you pointed-eared genius. God, Jim, is it good to see you like this again."

Kirk returned the hug. Stood back, grinning broadly. "You too, Bones. How are you? It's been a long time, nine months - "

"Nine months? Are you sure he's all right, Spock? Better get you back on board, Jim. Check you over properly." He peered suspiciously. "Or are you having me on? Nine months? It seems like years, but it was only a week ago since you fell ill."

"Fell ill? Disappeared, surely."

"Five days."

"What's that, Spock?"

"Five days. It is five days since the Captain's mysterious collapse."

"Five days, a week, where's the difference? Trust you to split hairs. What did you say, Jim?"

"I was not aware that I was splitting hairs, Doctor...one moment, Jim... Indeed, without the correct instruments..."

Kirk was strongly reminded of scenes from an old Earth musical comedy. Nineteenth century, he thought. Gilbert and...Sullivan. Putting an affectionate arm round each of them, he led them, still arguing, up the stairs. Just for a moment as he climbed he was overwhelmed by sadness so profound that it caused him actual physical pain. Not his own sadness, rather as though he were experiencing the sadness of all the partings the Universe had known, ever would know. It passed as quickly as it had come, leaving him with his two dear friends who were quarrelling from sheer relief at his return. This at least was no parting; this was a joyful reunion. He smiled warmly.

"Well, you two haven't changed in nine months anyway. Come on, gentlemen, time to go home."

The Chief Engineer himself worked the transporter in honour of the occasion.

"Captain...Jim. Good to see ye recovered." Warmly they shook hands.

"Good to be back, Scotty."

"Aye, sir. What ye could do with now is a guid holiday. Lucky we're on our way to Ondiren at last. A fine place that, sir. Fine and sunny."

Kirk paled visibly. "Sunny, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye. Jist the thing for ye. Ye're still a mite pale, sir. A week or so o' guid hot sun and ye'll be yer old self."

"Well, it's a funny thing, Scotty. I rather fancy winter sports. Is there no snow on Ondiren?"

"Och, no, sir. It's famed for its sunshine records. Ye dinna want snow, laddie."

Spock lifted an eyebrow at Kirk. "I think the Captain feels he has had sufficient sun on Vulcan, Mr. Scott."

"But Mr. Spock, Captain..." The volatile Scot was becoming slightly agitated. "Ye've only been on Vulcan a couple of hours."

Giving his bondmate his best 'You wait until we're alone' glare, the Captain of the Starship Enterprise touched Scott's shoulder consolingly, his voice soft. "Two hours...five days...nine months... It's all the same in the end, Scotty." He raised his voice to its best command level. "Gentlemen - to the bridge."

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The little garden seemed dull and lifeless once the sun had left it. The small fountain still played, but without its former sparkle. The vivid colours of the flowers were muted. The tall hedges and gathering purple evening clouds lent a sombre note to the scene.

The boy hesitated at the foot of the steps. The man on the bench looked so still, so withdrawn, so sad. The man's sadness gave courage to the boy. Moving forwards, he touched him gently.

The boy's touch brought the man back to reality. He looked up, startled. The boy saw that he had been weeping.

Slowly the man gathered himself together, took hold of the boy's hand. "Selek, my dear son," he said simply.

Selek smiled, gladdened by the affection in his father's eyes. "Father, it is time for the Sunfall meal. Mother sent me to tell you."

"Yes, I am coming." He rose to his feet, and, one arm round Selek's shoulders, began to climb the steps to leave the garden. Near the top, T'Kai appeared out of the shadows of the tall hedge.

"Spock." She was hesitant, and he sensed that she knew something of what must have happened. "My dear, it is late. Serek and I...we missed you. Will you come with us for the Sunfall meal?" She half held out a hand. Drew it back uncertainly, as though fearing a repulse.- she, who had known so many - then, determinedly, held it out to him again.

He stepped forward to meet her. Without releasing Selek, he took her in his arms. "T'Kai. My beloved wife." He held them both close for a long while.

"Come, my dears," he said at last. "There is much for us to do."

Arms wound closely, the three moved out of the garden, turned towards the house. Behind them the fountain splashed ceaselessly into the little pool. As it had done for many years. As it would do for so many years to come.



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